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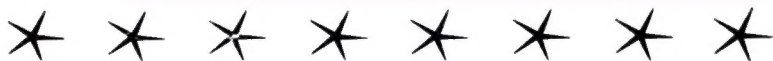
READER No.16

THE Black Kiss

by Robert Bloch

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AND
WEIRD SUSPENSE





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of a Lorelei with the Intentions
of a Man-Eating Lady Shark!**

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FANTASY READER

No. 16

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Stories by

ROBERT BLOCH

DONALD WANDREI

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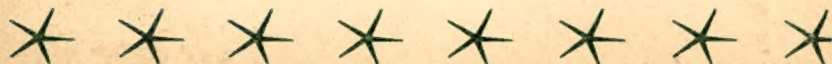
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575 Madison Ave., New York 22, N.Y.



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The Black Kiss

by Robert Bloch

All life originated in the sea and all land animals also came out of the watery depths. Some warm-blooded mammals have even returned to these parental waters. Of the ocean's denizens we probably know less than half—almost any deep sea fisherman can tell of creatures caught in their nets which defy classification. Therefore there may be more to the legendry of mermaids than the world cares to acknowledge. In any case, Robert Bloch, who scarcely needs more than a hint to hang a good yarn on, has gone to town with a story of the seacoast and something that came from off-shore to wreak a queer turn on an incautious mortal.

They rise in green robes roaring from the green hells of the sea,
Where fallen skies and evil hues and eyeless creatures be.

—Chesterton: *Lepanto*.

1. The Thing in the Waters

GRAHAM DEAN nervously crushed out his cigarette and met Doctor Hedwig's puzzled eyes.

"I've never been troubled like this before," he said. "These dreams are so oddly persistent. They're not the usual haphazard nightmares. They seem—I know it sounds ridiculous—they seem *planned*."

"Dreams planned? Nonsense." Doctor Hedwig looked scornful. "You, Mr. Dean, are an artist, and naturally of impressionable temperament. This house at San Pedro is new to you, and you say you've heard wild tales. The dreams are due to imagination and overwork."

Dean glanced out of the window, a frown on his unnaturally pale face. "I hope you're right," he said, softly. "But dreams shouldn't make me look like this. Should they?"

A gesture indicated the great blue rings beneath the young artist's eyes. His hands indicated the bloodless pallor of his gaunt cheeks.

"Overwork has done that, Mr. Dean. I know what has happened to you better than you do yourself."

The white-haired physician picked up a sheet covered with his own scarcely decipherable notes and scrutinized it in review.

"You inherited this house at San Pedro a few months ago, eh? And you moved in alone to do some work."

"Yes. The seacoast there has some marvelous scenes." For a moment Dean's face looked youthful once more as enthusiasm kindled its ashy fires. Then he continued, with a troubled frown. "But I haven't been able to paint, lately—not seascapes, anyway. It's very odd. My sketches don't seem quite right any more. There seems to be a quality in them that I don't put there——"

"A quality, did you say?"

"Yes. A quality of *malignness*, if I can call it that. It's indefinable. Something *behind* the picture takes all the beauty out. And I haven't been overworking these last weeks, Doctor Hedwig."

The doctor glanced again at the paper in his hand.

"Well, I disagree with you there. You might be unconscious of the effort you expend. These dreams of the sea that seem to worry you are meaningless, save as an indication of your nervous condition."

"You're wrong," Dean rose, suddenly. His voice was shrill.

"That's the dreadful part of it. The dreams are *not* meaningless. They seem cumulative; cumulative and planned. Each night they grow more vivid, and I see more of that green, shining place under the sea. I get closer and closer to those black shadows swimming there; those shadows that I know aren't shadows but something worse. I see more each night. It's like a sketch I'd block out, gradually adding more and more until——"

Hedwig watched his patient keenly. He suggested "Until——?"

But Dean's tense face relaxed. He had caught himself just in time. "No, Doctor Hedwig. You must be right. It's overwork and nervousness, as you say. If I believed what the Mexicans had told me about Morella Godolfo—well, I'd be mad and a fool."

"Who is this Morella Godolfo? Some woman who has been filling you with foolish tales?"

Dean smiled. "No need to worry about Morella. She was my great-great-grand-aunt. She used to live in the San Pedro house and started the legends, I think."

Hedwig had been scribbling on a slip of paper. "Well, I see, young man! You heard these legends; your imagination ran riot; you dreamed. This prescription will fix you up."

"Thanks."

Dean took the paper, lifted his hat from the table, and started for the door. In the doorway he paused, smiling wryly.

"But you're not quite correct in thinking the legends started me dreaming, Doctor. I began to dream before I learned the history of the house."

And with that he went out.

Driving back to San Pedro, Dean tried to understand what had happened

to him. But always he came up against a blank wall of impossibility. Any logical explanation wandered off into a tangle of fantasy. The one thing he could not explain—which Doctor Hedwig had not been able to explain—was the dreams.

The dreams started soon after he came into his legacy; this ancient house north of San Pedro, which had so long stood deserted. The place was picturesquely old, and that attracted Dean from the first. It had been built by one of his ancestors when the Spaniards still ruled California. One of the Deans—the name was Dena, then—had gone to Spain and returned with a bride. Her name was Morella Godolfo, and it was this long-vanished woman about whom all the subsequent legends centered.

Even yet there were wrinkled, toothless Mexicans in San Pedro who whispered incredible tales of Morella Godolfo—she who had never grown old and who had a weirdly evil power over the sea. The Godolfos had been among the proudest families of Granada, but furtive legends spoke of their intercourse with the terrible Moorish sorcerers and necromancers. Morella, according to these same hinted horrors, had learned uncanny secrets in the black towers of Moorish Spain, and when Dena had brought her as his bride across the sea she had already sealed a pact with dark Powers and had undergone a *change*.

So ran the tales, and they further told of Morella's life in the old San Pedro house. Her husband had lived for ten years or more after the marriage, but rumors said that he no longer possessed a soul. It is certain that his death was very mysteriously hushed up by Morella Godolfo, who went on living alone in the great house beside the sea.

The whispers of the peons were hereafter monstrously augmented. They had to do with the *change* in Morella Godolfo; the sorcerous change which caused her to swim far out to sea on moonlit nights so that watchers saw her white body gleaming amidst the spray. Men bold enough to gaze from the cliffs might catch glimpses of her then, sporting with queer sea-creatures that gamboled about her in the black waters, nuzzling her with shockingly deformed heads. These creatures were not seals, or any known form of submarine life, it was averred; although sometimes bursts of chuckling, gobbling laughter could be heard. It is said that Morella Godolfo had swum out there one night, and that she never came back. But thereafter the laughter was louder from afar, and the sporting amidst the black rocks continued, so that the tales of the early peons had been nourished down to the present day.

Such were the legends known to Dean. The facts were sparse and inconclusive. The old house had fallen into decrepitude, and was only occasionally rented through the years. These rentals had been as short as they were infrequent. There was nothing definitely wrong with the house between White's Point and Point Fermin, but those who had lived there said that the crashing of the surf sounded subtly different when heard through windows that overlooked the sea, and, too, they dreamed unpleasantly. Sometimes the occasional tenants had mentioned with peculiar horror the moonlit

nights, when the sea became altogether too clearly visible. At any rate, occupants often vacated the house hastily.

Dean had moved in immediately after inheriting, because he had thought the place ideal for painting the scenes he loved. He had learned the legend and the facts behind it later, and by this time his dreams had started.

At first they had been conventional enough, though, oddly, all centered about the sea which he so loved. But it was not the sea he loved that he knew in sleep.

The Gorgons lived in his dreams. Scylla writhed hideously across dark and surging waters, where harpies flew screaming. Weird creatures crawled sluggishly up from the black, inky depths where eyeless, bloated sea-beasts dwelt. Gigantic and terrible leviathans leapt and plunged while monstrous serpents squirmed a strange obeisance to a mocking moon. Foul and hidden horrors of the sea's depths engulfed him in sleep.

This was bad enough, but it was only a prelude. The dreams began to change. It was almost as though the first few formed a definite setting for the greater terrors to come. From the mythic images of old sea-gods another vision emerged. It was inchoate at first, taking definite form and meaning, very slowly over a period of several weeks. And it was this dream which Dean now feared.

It had occurred generally just before he awoke—a vision of green, translucent light, in which dark shadows swam slowly. Night after night the limpid emerald glow grew brighter, and the shadows twisted into a more visible horror. These were never clearly seen, although their amorphous heads held a strangely repellent recognizable quality for Dean.

Presently, in this dream of his, the shadow-creatures would move aside as though to permit the passage of another. Swimming into the green haze would come a coiling shape—whether similar to the rest or not Dean could not tell, for his dream always ended there. The approach of this last shape always caused him to awake in a nightmare paroxysm of terror.

He dreamt of being somewhere under the sea, amidst swimming shadows with deformed heads; and each night one particular shadow was coming closer and closer.

Each day, now, when he awoke with the cold sea-wind of early dawn blowing through the windows, he would lie in a lazy, languid mood till long past daybreak. When he rose these days he felt inexplicably tired, and he could not paint. This particular morning the sight of his haggard face in the mirror had forced him to visit a physician. But Doctor Hedwig had not been helpful.

Nevertheless Dean filled the prescription on the way home. A swallow of the bitter, brownish tonic strengthened him somewhat, but as he parked his car the feeling of depression settled down on him again. He walked up to the house still puzzled and strangely afraid.

Under the door was a telegram. Dean read it with a puzzled frown.

JUST LEARNED YOU ARE LIVING IN SAN PEDRO HOUSE STOP VITALLY IMPORTANT YOU VACATE IMMEDIATELY STOP SHOW THIS CABLE TO DOCTOR MAKOTO YAMADA 17 BUENA STREET SAN PEDRO STOP AM RETURNING VIA AIRPLANE STOP SEE YAMADA TODAY

MICHAEL LEIGH

Dean read the message again, and a flash of remembrance came to him. Michael Leigh was his uncle, but he had not seen the man for years. Leigh had been a puzzle to the family; he was an occultist, and spent most of his time delving in far corners of the earth. Occasionally he dropped from sight for long periods of time. The cable Dean held was sent from Calcutta, and he supposed that Leigh had recently emerged from some spot in the interior of India to learn of Dean's inheritance.

Dean searched his mind. He recalled now, that there had been some family quarrel about this very house years ago. The details were no longer clear, but he remembered that Leigh had demanded the San Pedro house be razed. Leigh had given no sane reasons, and when the request was refused he had dropped out of sight for a time. And now came this inexplicable cablegram.

Dean was tired from his long drive, and the unsatisfactory interview with the doctor had irritated him more than he had realized. Nor was he in the mood to follow his uncle's cabled request and undertake the long journey to Buena Street, which was miles away. The drowsiness which he felt, however, was normal healthy exhaustion, unlike the languor of recent weeks. The tonic he had taken was of some value after all.

He dropped into his favorite chair by the window that overlooked the sea, rousing himself to watch the flaming colors of the sunset. Presently the sun dropped below the horizon, and gray dusk crept in. Stars appeared, and far to the north he could see the dim lights of the gambling-ships off Venice. The mountains shut off his view of San Pedro, but a diffused pale glow in that direction told him that the New Barbary was wakening into roaring, brawling life. Slowly the face of the Pacific brightened. A full moon was rising above the San Pedro hills.

For a long time Dean sat quietly by the window, his pipe forgotten in his hand, staring down at the slow swells of the ocean, which seemed to pulse with a mighty and alien life. Gradually drowsiness crept up and overwhelmed him. Just before he dropped into the abyss of sleep there flashed into his mind da Vinci's saying, "The two most wonderful things in the world are a woman's smile and the motion of mighty waters."

He dreamed, and this time it was a different dream. At first only blackness, and a roaring and thundering as of angry seas, and oddly mingled with this was the hazy thought of a woman's smile . . . and a woman's lips . . . pouting lips, softly alluring . . . but strangely the lips were not red—no! They were very pale, bloodless, like the lips of a thing that had long rested beneath the sea. . . .

The misty vision changed, and for a flashing instant Dean seemed to see the green and silent place of his earlier visions. The shadowy black shapes were moving more quickly behind the veil, but this picture was of but a second's duration. It flashed out and vanished, and Dean was standing alone on a beach; a beach he recognized in his dream—the sandy cove beneath the house.

The salt breeze blew coldly across his face, and the sea glistened like silver in the moonlight. A faint splash told of a sea-thing that broke the surface of the waters. To the north the sea washed against the rugged surface of the cliff, barred and speckled with black shadows. Dean felt a sudden, inexplicable impulse to move in that direction. He yielded.

As he clambered over the rocks he was suddenly conscious of a strange sensation, as though keen eyes were focussed upon him—eyes that watched and warned! Vaguely in his mind rose up the gaunt face of his uncle, Michael Leigh, the deep-set eyes glowing. But swiftly this was gone, and he found himself before a deeper niche of blackness in the cliff face. Into it he knew he must go.

He squeezed himself between two jutting points of rock, and found himself in utter, dismal darkness. Yet somehow he was conscious that he was in a cave, and he could hear water lapping near by. All about him was a musty salt odor of sea-decay, the fetid smell of sunless ocean caves and holds of ancient ships. He stepped forward, and, as the floor shelved sharply downward, stumbled and fell headlong into icy, shallow water. He felt, rather than saw, a flicker of swift movement, and then abruptly hot lips were pressed against his.

Human lips, Dean thought, at first.

He lay on his side in the chill water, his lips against those responsive ones. He could see nothing, for all was lost in the blackness of the cave. The unearthly lure of those invisible lips thrilled through him.

He responded to them, pressed them fiercely, gave them what they were avidly seeking. The unseen waters crawled against the rocks, whispering warning.

And in that kiss strangeness flooded him. He felt a shock and a tingling go through him, and then a thrill of sudden ecstasy, and swift on its heels came horror. Black loathsome foulness seemed to wash his brain, indescribable but fearfully real, making him shudder with nausea. It was as though unutterable evil were pouring into his body, his mind, his very soul, through the blasphemous kiss on his lips. He felt loathsome, contaminated. He fell back. He sprang to his feet.

And Dean saw, for the first time, the ghastly thing he had kissed, as the sinking moon sent a pale shaft of radiance creeping through the cave mouth. For something rose up before him, a serpentine and seal-like bulk that coiled and twisted and moved toward him, glistening with foul slime; and Dean screamed and turned to flee with nightmare fear tearing at his brain, hear-

ing behind him a quiet splashing as though some bulky creature had slid back into the water. . . .

2. *A Visit from Doctor Yamada*

He awoke. He was still in his chair before the window, and the moon was paling before the grayness of dawn. He was shaken with nausea, sick and shuddering with the shocking realism of his dream. His clothing was drenched with perspiration, and his heart hammered furiously. An immense lethargy seemed to have overwhelmed him, making it an intense effort to rise from the chair and stagger to a couch, on which he flung himself to doze fitfully for several hours.

A sharp pealing of the door-bell roused him. He still felt weak and dizzy, but the frightening lethargy had somewhat abated. When Dean opened the door, a Japanese standing on the porch began a bobbing little bow, a gesture that was abruptly arrested as the sharp black eyes focussed on Dean's face. A little hiss of indrawn breath came from the visitor.

Dean said irritably, "Well? Do you want to see me?"

The other was still staring, his thin face sallow beneath a stiff thatch of gray hair. He was a small, slender man, with his face covered with a fine-spun web of wrinkles. After a pause he said, "I am Doctor Yamada."

Dean frowned, puzzled. Abruptly he remembered his uncle's cable of the day before. An odd, unreasonable irritation began to mount within him, and he said, more brusquely than he had intended, "This isn't a professional call, I hope. I've already——"

"Your uncle—you are Mr. Dean?—cabled me. He was rather worried." Doctor Yamada glanced around almost furtively.

Dean felt distaste stir within him, and his irritation increased.

"My uncle is rather eccentric, I'm afraid. There's nothing for him to worry about. I'm sorry you had your trip for nothing."

Doctor Yamada did not seem to take offense at Dean's attitude. Rather, a strange expression of sympathy showed for a moment on his small face.

"Do you mind if I come in?" he asked, and moved forward confidently.

Short of barring his way, Dean had no means of stopping him, and ungraciously led his guest to the room where he had spent the night, motioning him to a chair while he busied himself with a coffee-pot.

Yamada sat motionless, silently watching Dean. Then without preamble he said, "Your uncle is a great man, Mr. Dean."

Dean made a noncommittal gesture. "I have seen him only once."

"He is one of the greatest occultists of this day. I, too, have studied psychic lore, but beside your uncle I am a novice."

Dean said, "He is eccentric. Occultism, as you term it, has never interested me."

The little Japanese watched him impassively. "You make a common error, Mr. Dean. You consider occultism a hobby for cranks. No" —he held up a slender hand—"your disbelief is written in your face. Well, it is under-

standable. It is an anachronism, an attitude handed down from the earliest times, when scientists were called alchemists and sorcerers and burned for making pacts with the devil. But actually there are no sorcerers, no—witches. Not in the sense that man understands these terms. There are men and women who have acquired mastery over certain sciences which are not wholly subject to mundane physical laws."

There was a little smile of disbelief on Dean's face. Yamada went on quietly. "You do not believe because you do not understand. There are not many who can comprehend, or who wish to comprehend, this greater science which is not bound by earthly laws. But here is a problem for you, Mr. Dean." A little spark of irony flickered in the black eyes. "Can you tell me how I know you have suffered from nightmares recently?"

Dean jerked around and stood staring. Then he smiled.

"As it happens, I know the answer, Doctor Yamada. You physicians have a way of hanging together—and I must have let something slip to Doctor Hedwig yesterday." His tone was offensive, but Yamada merely shrugged slightly.

"Do you know your Homer?" he asked, apparently irrelevantly, and at Dean's surprised nod went on, "And Proteus? You remember the Old Man of the Sea who possessed the power of changing his shape? I do not wish to strain your credulity, Mr. Dean, but for a long time students of the dark lore have known that behind this legend there exists a very terrible truth. All the tales of spirit-possession, of reincarnation, even the comparatively innocuous experiments in thought-transference, point to the truth. Why do you suppose folklore abounds with tales of men who have been able to change themselves into beasts—werewolves, hyenas, tigers, the seal-men of the Eskimos? Because these tales are founded on truth!"

"I do not mean," he went on, "that the actual physical metamorphosis of the body is possible, so far as we know. But it has long been known that the intelligence—the mind—of an adept can be transferred to the brain and body of a satisfactory subject. Animals' brains are weak, lacking the power of resistance. But men are different, unless there are certain circumstances——"

As he hesitated, Dean proffered the Japanese a cup of coffee—coffee was generally brewing in the percolator these days—and Yamada accepted it with a formal little bow of acknowledgment. Dean drank his coffee in three hasty gulps, and poured more. Yamada, after a polite sip, put the cup aside and leaned forward earnestly.

"I must ask you to make your mind receptive, Mr. Dean. Don't allow your conventional ideas of life to influence you in this matter. It is vitally to your interest that you listen carefully to me, and understand. Then—perhaps——"

He hesitated, and again threw that oddly furtive glance at the window. "Life in the sea has followed different lines from life on land. Evolution has followed a different course. In the great deeps of the ocean, life utterly

alien to ours has been discovered—luminous creatures which burst when exposed to the lighter pressure of the air—and in those tremendous depths forms of life completely inhuman have been developed, life forms that the uninitiated mind may think impossible. In Japan, an island country, we have known of these sea-dwellers for generations. Your English writer, Arthur Machen, has told a deep truth in his statement that man, afraid of these strange beings, has attributed to them beautiful or pleasantly grotesque forms which in reality they do not possess. Thus we have the nereids and oceanids—but nevertheless man could not fully disguise the true foulness of these creatures. Therefore there are legends of the Gorgons, of Scylla and the harpies—and, significantly, of the mermaids and their soullessness. No doubt you know the mermaid tale—how they long to steal the soul of a man, and draw it out by means of their kiss."

Dean was at the window now, his back to the Japanese. As Yamada paused he said tonelessly, "Go on."

"I have reason to believe," Yamada went on very quietly, "that Morella Godolfo, the woman from Alhambra, was not fully—human. She left no issue. These things never have children—they cannot."

"What do you mean?" Dean had turned and was facing the Japanese, his face a ghastly white, the shadows beneath his eyes hideously livid. He repeated harshly, "What do you mean? You can't frighten me with your tales—if that's what you're trying to do. You—my uncle wants me out of this house, for some reason of his own. You're taking this means of getting me out—aren't you? Eh?"

"You must leave this house," Yamada said. "Your uncle is coming, but he may not be in time. Listen to me: these creatures—the sea-dwellers—envy man. Sunlight, and warm fires, and the fields of earth—things which the sea-dwellers cannot normally possess. These things—and *love*. You remember what I said about mind-transference—the possession of a brain by an alien intelligence. That is the only way these things can attain that which they desire, and know the love of man or woman. Sometimes—not very often—one of these creatures succeeds in possessing itself of a human body. They watch always. When there is a wreck, they go there, like vultures to a feast. They can swim phenomenally fast. When a man is drowning, the defenses of his mind are down, and sometimes the sea-dwellers can thus acquire a human body. There have been tales of men saved from wrecks who ever after were oddly changed.

"Morella Godolfo was one of these creatures! The Godolfos knew much of the dark lore, but used it for evil purposes—the so-called black magic. And it was, I think, through this that sea-dweller gained power to usurp the brain and body of the woman. A transference took place. The mind of the sea-dweller took possession of Morella Godolfo's body, and the intelligence of the original Morella was forced into the terrible form of that creature of the abyss. In time the human body of the woman died, and the usurping mind returned to its original shell. The intelligence of Morella

Godolfo was then ejected from its temporary prison, and left homeless. That is true death."

Dean shook his head slowly, as though in denial, but did not speak. And inexorably Yamada kept on.

"For years, generations, since then she has dwelt in the sea, waiting. Her power is strongest here, where she once lived. But, as I told you, only under unusual circumstances can this—transference take place. The tenants of this house might be troubled with dreams, but that would be all. The evil being had no power to steal their bodies. Your uncle knew that, or he would have insisted that the place be immediately destroyed. He did not foresee that you would ever live here."

The little Japanese bent forward, and his eyes were twin points of black light.

"You do not need to tell me what you have undergone in the past month. I know. The sea-dweller has power over you. For one thing, there are bonds of blood, even though you are not directly descended from her. And your love for the ocean—your uncle spoke of that. You live here alone with your paintings and your imaginative fancies; you see no one else. You are an ideal victim, and it was easy for that sea horror to become *en rapport* with you. Even now you show the stigmata."

Dean was silent, his face a pale shadow amidst the darker ones in the corners of the room. What was the man trying to tell him? What were these hints leading up to?

"Remember what I have said." Doctor Yamada's voice was fanatically earnest. "That creature wants you for your youth—your soul. She has lured you in sleep, with visions of Poseidonis, the twilight grottoes in the deep. She has sent you beguiling visions at first, to hide what she was doing. She has drained your life forces, weakened your resistance, waiting until she is strong enough to take possession of your brain.

"I have told you what she wants—what all these hybrid horrors raven for. She will reveal herself to you in time, and when her will is strong upon you in slumber, you will do her bidding. She will take you down into the deep, and show you the kraken-fouled gulfs where these things bide. You will go willingly, and that will be your doom. She may lure you to their feasts there—the feasts they hold upon the drowned things they find floating from wrecked ships. And you will live such madness in your sleep because she rules you. And then—then, when you have become weak enough, she will have her desire. The sea-thing will usurp your body and walk once more on earth. And you will go down into the darkness where once you dwelt in dreams, for ever. Unless I am mistaken, you have already seen enough to know that I speak truth. I think that this terrible moment is not so far off, and I warn you that alone you cannot hope to resist the evil. Only with the aid of your uncle and me——"

Doctor Yamada stood up. He moved forward and confronted the dazed

youth face to face. In a low voice he asked, "In your dreams—*has the thing kissed you?*"

For a heart-beat there was utter silence. Dean opened his mouth to speak, and then a curious little warning note seemed to sound in his brain. It rose, like the quiet roaring of a conch-shell, and a vague nausea assailed him.

Almost without volition he heard himself saying, "No."

Dimly, as though from an incredibly far distance, he heard Yamada suck in his breath, as if surprised. Then the Japanese said, "That is good. Very good. Now listen: your uncle will be here soon. He has chartered a special plane. Will you be my guest until he arrives?"

The room seemed to darken before Dean's eyes. The form of the Japanese was receding, dwindling. Through the window the surf-sound came crashing, and it rolled on in waves through Dean's brain. In its thunder a thin, insistent whispering penetrated.

"Accept," it murmured. "Accept!" And Dean heard his own voice accept Yamada's invitation.

He seemed incapable of coherent thought. That last dream haunted him . . . and now Doctor Yamada's disturbing story . . . he was ill—that was it!—very ill. He wanted very much to sleep, now. A flood of darkness seemed to wash up and engulf him. Gratefully he allowed it to sweep through his tired head. Nothing existed but the dark, and a restless lapping of unquiet waters.

Yet he seemed to know, in an odd way, that he was still—some outer part of him—conscious. He strangely realized that he and Doctor Yamada had left the house, were entering a car, and driving a long way. He was—with that strange, external other self—talking casually to the doctor; entering his house in San Pedro; drinking; eating. And all the while his soul, his real being, was buried in waves of blackness.

Finally a bed. From below, the surf seemed to blend into the blackness that engulfed his brain. It spoke to him now, as he rose stealthily and clambered out of the window. The fall jarred his outer self considerably, but he was on the ground outside without injury. He kept in the shadows as he crept away down to the beach—the black, hungry shadows that were like the darkness surging through his soul.

3. Three Dreadful Hours

With a shock, he was himself once more—completely. The cold water had done it; the water in which he found himself swimming. He was in the ocean, borne on waves as silver as the lightning that occasionally flashed overhead. He heard thunder, felt the sting of rain. Without wondering about the sudden transition, he swam on, as though fully aware of some planned destination. For the first time in over a month he felt fully alive, actually himself. There was a surge of wild elation in him that defied the facts; he no longer seemed to care about his recent illness, the weird warnings of his uncle and Doctor Yamada, and the unnatural darkness that had

previously shadowed his mind. In fact, he no longer had to think—it was as though he were being *directed* in all his movements.

He was swimming parallel with the beach now, and with curious detachment he observed that the storm had subsided. A pale, fog-like glow hovered over the lashing waters, and it seemed to beckon.

The air was chill, as was the water, and the waves high; yet Dean experienced neither cold nor fatigue. And when he saw the things that waited for him on the rocky beach just ahead, he lost all perception of himself in a crescendo of mounting joy.

This was inexplicable, for they were the creatures of his last and wildest nightmares. Even now he did not see them plainly as they sported in the surf, but there were dim suggestions of past horror in their tenebrous outlines. The things were like seals; great, fish-like, bloated monsters with pulpy, shapeless heads. These heads rested on columnar necks that undulated with serpentine ease, and he observed, without any sensation other than curious familiarity, that the heads and bodies of the creatures were a sea-bleached white.

Soon he was swimming in among them—swimming with peculiar and disturbing ease. Inwardly he marveled, with a touch of his former feeling, that he was not now horrified by the sea-beasts in the least. Instead, it was almost with a feeling of kinship that he listened to their strange low gruntings and cackles—listened *and understood*.

He *knew* what they were saying, and he was not amazed. He was not frightened by what he heard, though the words would have sent abysmal horror through his soul in the previous dreams.

He knew where they were going and what they meant to do when the entire group swam out into the water once more, yet he did not fear. Instead, he felt a strange hunger at the thought of what was to come, a hunger that impelled him to take the lead as the things, with undulant swiftness, glided through the inky waters to the north. They swam with incredible speed, yet it was hours before a sea-coast loomed up through the murk, lit by a blinding flare of light from offshore.

Twilight deepened to true darkness over the water, but the offshore light burned brightly. It seemed to come from a huge wreck in the waves just off the coast, a great hulk floating on the waters like a crumpled beast. There were boats gathered around it, and floating flares of light that revealed the scene.

As though by instinct, Dean, with the pack behind him, headed for the spot. Swiftly and silently they sped, their slimy heads blurred in the shadows to which they clung as they circled the boats and swam in toward the great crumpled shape. Now it was looming above him, and he could see arms flailing desperately as man after man sank below the surface. The colossal bulk from which they leaped was a wreck of twisted girders in which he could trace the warped outline of a vaguely familiar shape.

And now, with curious disinterest, he swam lazily about, avoiding the lights bobbing over the water as he watched the actions of his companions.

They were hunting their prey. Leering muzzles gaped for the drowning men, and lean talons raked bodies from the darkness. Whenever a man was glimpsed in shadows not yet invaded by rescue-boats, one of the sea-things craftily snared his victim.

In a little while they turned and slowly swam away. But now many of the creatures clutched a grisly trophy at their squamous breasts. The pale white limbs of drowning men trailed in the water as they were dragged off into the darkness by their captors. To the accompaniment of low, carrion laughter the beasts swam away, back down the coast.

Dean swam with the rest. His mind was again a blur of confusion. He knew what that thing in the water was, and yet he could not name it. He had watched those hateful horrors snare doomed men and drag them off to the deep, yet he had not intervened. What was wrong? Even now, as he swam with frightening agility, he felt a call he could not fully understand—a call that his body was answering.

The hybrid things were gradually dispersing. With eery splashings they disappeared below the surface of the gelid black waters, pulling with them the dreadfully limp bodies of the men, pulling them down to the blackness biding beneath.

They were hungry. Dean knew it without thinking. He swam on, along the coast, impelled by his curious urge. That was it—he was hungry.

And now he was going for food.

Hours of steady swimming southward. Then the familiar beach, and above it a lighted house which Dean recognized—his own house on the cliff. There were figures descending the slope now; two men with torches were coming down to the beach. He must not let them see him—why, he did not know, but they must not. He crawled along the beach, keeping close to the water's edge. Even so, he seemed to move very swiftly.

The men with the torches were some distance behind him now. Ahead loomed another familiar outline—a cave. He had clambered over these rocks before, it seemed. He knew the pits of shadow that speckled the cliff rock, and knew the narrow passage of stone through which he now squeezed his prostrate body.

Was that someone shouting, far away? . . .

Darkness, and a lapping pool. He crawled forward, felt chill waters creep over his body. Muffled by distance came an insistent shouting from outside the cave.

"Graham! Graham Dean!"

Then the smell of dank sea-foulness was in his nostrils—a familiar, pleasant smell. He knew where he was, now. It was the cave where in his dream he had kissed the sea-thing. It was the cave in which—

He remembered now. The black blur lifted from his brain, and he remembered all. His mind bridged the gap, and he once again recalled coming here earlier this very evening, before he had found himself in the water.

Morella Godolfo had called him here; here her dark whispers had guided

him at twilight, when he had come from the bed at Doctor Yamada's house. It was the siren song of the sea-creature that had lured him in dreams.

He remembered how she had coiled about his feet when he entered, flung her sea-bleached body up until its inhuman head had loomed close to his own. And then the hot pulpy lips had pressed against his—the loathsome, slimy lips had kissed him again. Wet, dank, horribly avid kiss! His senses had drowned in its evil, for he knew that this second kiss meant doom.

"The sea-dweller will take your body," Doctor Yamada had said. . . . And the second kiss meant doom.

All this had happened hours ago!

Dean shifted around in the rocky chamber to avoid wetting himself in the pool. As he did so, he glanced down at his body for the first time that night—glanced down with an undulating neck at the shape he had worn for three hours in the sea. He saw the fish-like scales, the scabrous whiteness of the slimy skin; saw the veined gills. He stared into the waters of the pool then, so that the reflection of his face was visible in the dim moonlight that filtered through fissures in the rocks.

He saw all. . . .

His head rested on the long, reptilian neck. It was an anthropoid head with flat contours that were monstrously inhuman. The eyes were white and protuberant; they bulged with the glassy stare of a drowning thing. There was no nose, and the center of the face was covered with a tangle of wormy blue feelers. The mouth was worst of all. Dean saw pale white lips in a dead face—human lips. Lips that had kissed his own. And now—*they were his own!*

He was in the body of the evil sea-thing—the evil sea-thing that had once harbored the soul of Morella Godolfo!

At that moment Dean would gladly have welcomed death, for the stark, blasphemous horror of his discovery was too much to bear. He knew about his dreams now, and the legends; he had learned the truth, and paid a hideous price. He recalled, vividly, how he had recovered consciousness in the water and swum out to meet those—others. He recalled the great black hulk from which drowning men had been taken in boats—the shattered wreck on the water. What was it Yamada had told him? "When there is a wreck they go there, like vultures to a feast." And now, at last, he remembered what had eluded him that night—what that familiar shape on the waters had been. It was a crashed zeppelin. He had gone swimming into the wreckage with those things, and they had taken men. . . . Three hours—God! Dean wanted very much to die. He was in the sea-body of Morella Godolfo, and it was too evil for further life.

Morella Godolfo! Where was *she*? And his own body, the shape of Graham Dean?

A rustling in the shadowy cavern behind him proclaimed the answer. Graham Dean saw *himself* in the moonlight—saw his body, line for line, hunching furtively past the pool in an attempt to creep away unobserved.

Dean's flippered fins moved swiftly. His own body turned.

It was ghastly for Dean to see himself reflected where no mirror existed; ghastlier still to see that in his face there no longer were *his* eyes. The sly, mocking stare of the sea-creature peered out at him from behind their fleshy mask, and they were ancient, evil. The pseudo-human snarled at him and tried to dodge off into the darkness. Dean followed, on all fours.

He knew what he must do. That sea-thing—Morella—she had taken his body during that last black kiss, just as he had been forced into hers. But she had not yet recovered enough to go out into the world. That was why he had found her still in the cave. Now, however, she would leave, and his uncle Michael would never know. The world would never know, either, what horror stalked its surface—until it was too late. Dean, his own tragic form hateful to him now, knew what he must do.

Purposefully he maneuvered the mocking body of himself into a rocky corner. There was a look of fright in those gelid eyes. . . .

A sound caused Dean to turn, pivoting his reptilian neck. Through glazed fish-eyes he saw the faces of Michael Leigh and Doctor Yamada. Torches in hand, they were entering the cave.

Dean knew what they would do, and he no longer cared. He closed in on the human body that housed the soul of the sea-beast; closed in with the beast's own flailing flippers; seized it in its own arms and menaced it with its own teeth near the creature's white, human neck.

From behind him he heard shouts and cries at his very back, but Dean did not care. He had a duty to perform; an atonement. Through the corner of his eye, he saw the barrel of a revolver as it glinted in Yamada's hand.

Then came two bursts of stabbing flame, and the oblivion Dean craved. But he died happy, for he had atoned for the black kiss.

Even as he sank into death, Graham Dean had bitten with animal fangs into his own throat, and his heart was filled with peace as, dying, he saw himself die . . .

His soul mingled in the third black kiss of Death.

Mr. Strenberry's Tale

by J. B. Priestley

Here is one of those delightfully odd stories that great writers turn out occasionally when they get an off-trail theme in their literary minds and can't find any other way of getting rid of it. Of course, J. B. Priestley is no stranger to fantasy; several of his novels and plays are in this category, but nevertheless you could never call this relatively simple tale a formula science-fiction story. Rather typical British tale construction, however: the inn, the stranger to the bar, the encounter, and the weird adventure recounted over the glasses. But good!

A

ND THANK YOU," said the landlady, with the mechanical cheerfulness of her kind. She pushed across the counter one shilling and four coppers, which all contrived to get wet on the journey. "Yes, it's quiet enough. Sort of weather to bring them in too, though it's a bit early yet for our lot. Who's in the Private Bar?" She craned her fat little neck, peered across the other side, and then returned, looking very confidential. "Only one. But he's one of our reg'lars. A bit too reg'lar, if you ask me, Mr. Strenberry is."

I put down my glass, and glanced out, through the open door. All I could see was a piece of wet road. The rain was falling now with that precision which suggests it will go on for ever. It was darker too. "And who is Mr. Strenberry?" I enquired, merely for want of something better to do. It did not matter to me who Mr. Strenberry was.

The landlady leaned forward a little. "He's the schoolmaster from down the road," she replied, in a delighted whisper. "Been here—oh, lemme see—it must be four years, might be five. Came from London here. Yes, that's where he came from, London. Sydenham, near the Crystal Palace, that's his home. I know because he's told me so himself, and I've a sister that's lived near there these twenty years."

I said nothing. There did not seem to be anything to say. The fact that the local schoolmaster came from Sydenham left me as uninterested as it found me. So I merely nodded, took another sip, and filled a pipe.

The landlady glanced at me with a faint reproach in her silly prominent

eyes. "And he's queer is Mr. Strenberry," she added, with something like defiance. "Oh yes, he's queer enough. Clever, y'know—in a sort of way, book-learning and all that, if you follow my meanin'—but, well—he's queer."

"In what way is he queer?" It was the least I could do.

She put her hand up to her mouth. "His wife left him. That's about two years ago. Took their little boy with her too. Gone to stay with relations, it was given out, but we all knew. She left him all right. Just walked out one fine morning and the little boy with her. Nice little boy, too, he was. He lives alone now, Mr. Strenberry. And a nice mess, too I'll be bound. Just look at his clothes. He won't be schoolmastering here much longer neither. He's been given a few warnings, that I do know. And you can't blame 'em, can you?"

I replied, with the melancholy resignation that was expected of me, that I could not blame them. Clearly, Mr. Strenberry, with his nice mess, his clothes, his general queerness, would not do.

The landlady shook her head and tightened her lips. "It's the same old trouble now. Taking too much. I don't say getting drunk—because, as far as I can see, he doesn't—but still, taking too much, too reg'lar with it. A lot o' people, temperancers and that sort," she went on, bitterly, "think we want to push it down customers' throats. All lies. I never knew anybody that kept a decent house that didn't want people to go steady with it. I've dropped a few hints to Mr. Strenberry, but he takes no notice. And what can you do? If he's quiet, behaves himself, and wants it, he's got to have it, hasn't he? We can't stop him. However, I don't want to say too much. And anyhow it isn't just what he takes that makes him queer. It's the way he goes on, and what he says—when he feels like saying anything, and that's not often."

"You mean, he talks queerly?" I said, casually. Perhaps a man of ideas, Mr. Strenberry.

"He might go for a week, he might go a fortnight, and not a word—except 'Good evening' or 'Thank you,' for he's always the gentleman in here, I must say—will you get out of him. Some of the lively ones try to draw him out a bit, pull his leg as you might say—but not a word. Then, all of a sudden, he'll let himself go, talk your head off. And you never heard such stuff. I don't say I've heard much of it myself because I haven't the time to listen to it and I can't be bothered with it, but some of the other customers have told me. If you ask me, it's a bit of a shame, the way they go on, because it's getting to be a case of——" And here she tapped her forehead significantly. "Mind you, it may have been his queerness that started all his troubles, his wife leaving him and all that. There's several that knows him better than I do will tell you that. Brought it all on himself, they say. But it does seem a pity, doesn't it?"

She looked at me mournfully for about a second and a half, then became brisk and cheerful again. "He's in there now," she added, and bustled away to the other side of the bar, where two carters were demanding half-pints.

I went to the outer door and stood there a moment, watching the persistent

rain. It looked as if I should not be able to make a move for at least half an hour. So I ordered another drink and asked the landlady to serve it in the Private Bar, where Mr. Strenberry was hiding his queerness. Then I followed her and took a seat near the window, only a few feet away from Mr. Strenberry.

He was sitting there behind a nearly empty glass, with an unlighted stump of cigarette drooping from a corner of his mouth. Everything about him was drooping. He was a tall, slack, straggling sort of fellow; his thin greying hair fell forward in front; his nose was long, with something pendulous about its reddened tip; his moustache drooped wearily; and even his chin fell away, as if in despair. His eye had that boiled look common to all persevering toppers.

"Miserable day," I told him.

"It is," he said. "Rotten day." He had a high-pitched but slightly husky voice, and I imagined that its characteristic tone would probably be querulous.

There was silence then, or at least nothing but the sound of the rain outside and the murmur of voices from the bar. I stared at the Highlanders and the hunting men who, from various parts of the room, invited you to try somebody's whisky and somebody else's port.

"Got a match?" said Strenberry, after fumbling in his pockets.

I handed him my matchbox and took the opportunity of moving a little nearer. It was obvious that that stump of cigarette would not last him more than half a minute, so I offered him my cigarette case too.

"Very quiet in here," I remarked.

"For once," he replied, a kind of weak sneer lighting up his face. "Lucky for us too. There are more fools in this town than in most, and they all come in here. Lot of loud-mouthed idiots. I won't talk to 'em, won't waste my breath on 'em. They think there's something wrong with me here. They *would*." He carefully drained his glass, set it down, then pushed it away.

I hastened to finish my glass of bitter. Then I made a pretence of examining the weather. "Looks as if I shall have to keep under cover for another quarter of an hour or so," I said carelessly. "I'm going to have another drink. Won't you join me?"

After a little vague humming and spluttering, he said he would, and thanked me. He asked for a double whisky and a small soda.

"And so you find the people here very stupid?" I said, after we had taken toll of our fresh supply of drink. "They often are in these small towns."

"All idiots," he muttered. "Not a man with an educated mind amongst them. But then—education! It's a farce, that's all it is, a farce. I come in here—I must go somewhere, you know—and I sit in a corner and say nothing. I know what they're beginning to think. Oh, I've seen them—nudging, you know, giving each other the wink. I don't care. One time I would have cared. Now I don't. It doesn't matter. Nothing matters, really."

I objected mildly to this pessimism.

"I know," he went on, looking at me sombrely. "You needn't tell me. I can see you're an intelligent man, so it's different. But you can't argue with

me, and I'll tell you why. You see, you don't know what I know. Oh, I don't care if they do think I'm queer. I *am* queer. And so would you be if you'd seen what I've seen. They wouldn't because they wouldn't have the sense. . . ." His voice trailed away. He shrugged his thin sloping shoulders. His face took on a certain obstinate look that you often see on the faces of weak men. Evidently he thought he had said too much.

I was curious now. "I don't see what you mean," I began. "No doubt you've had unpleasant experiences, but then most of us have at some time or other." I looked at him expectantly.

"I don't mean that," he said, raising his voice and adding a touch of scorn. "This is different. You wouldn't understand, unless I told you it all. Even then you mightn't. It's difficult. Oh, what's the use!" He finished his whisky in one quick gulp.

"Well, I wish you'd tell me."

Doubtfully, mournfully, he examined my face, then he stared about the room, pulling his straggling and drooping moustache. "Could I have another cigarette?" he asked, finally. When he had lit it, he blew out a cloud of smoke, then looked at me again.

"I've seen something nobody else has seen," said Mr. Strenberry. "I've seen the end of it all, all this," he waved a hand and gave a bitter little laugh, "building houses, factories, education, public health, churches, drinking in pubs, getting children, walking in fields, everything, every mortal blessed thing. That's what I've seen, a glimpse anyhow. Finish! Finish! The End!"

"It sounds like doomsday," I told him.

"And that's what it was," cried Mr. Strenberry, his face lighting up strangely. "Anyway, that's what it amounted to. I can't think about anything else. And you couldn't either, if you'd been there. I've gone back to it, thought about it, thought round and round it, oh, thousands of times! Do you know Opperton Heath? You do? Well, that's where it happened, nearly three years ago. That's all, three years ago. I'd gone up there for a walk and to have a look at the birds. I used to be very interested in birds—my God, I've dropped that now—and there are one or two rare kinds up on the Heath there. You know what it's like—lonely. I hadn't met a soul all afternoon. That's the worst of it. If there'd only been somebody else there——"

He broke off, took up his smouldering cigarette, put it down again and stared in front of him. I kept quiet, afraid that a chance word might suddenly shut him up altogether.

"It was a warm afternoon," he said, beginning again as abruptly as he had stopped, "and I was lying on the grass, smoking. I remember I was wondering whether to hurry back and get home in time for tea or to stay where I was and not bother about tea. And I wish to God I'd decided to go back, before it happened. But I didn't. There I was, warm, a bit drowsy, just looking at the Heath. Not a soul in sight. Very quiet. If I could write poetry, I'd write a poem about the Heath as I saw it then, before the thing happened. It's all I would write too. The last five minutes there." He broke off again,

and I believe there were tears in his eyes. He looked a figure of maudlin self-pity, but nevertheless it may have been the lost peace and beauty of the world that conjured up those tears. I did not know then. I do not know now.

"Then I saw something," said Mr. Strenberry. "It was a sort of disturbance in the air, not fifty yards from where I was. I didn't take much notice at first, because you get that flickering on a warm day up there. But this went on. I can't describe it properly, not to make you see it. But in a minute or two, you couldn't help noticing it. Like a thin revolving column of air. A waterspout made of air, if you see what I mean? And there was something dark, something solid, in the centre of it. I thought it must have something to do with a meteor. I got up and went closer, cautiously, you know, taking no chances. It didn't seem to be affecting anything else. There was no wind or anything. Everything was as quiet as it was before. But this column of air was more definite now, though I can't exactly explain how it came to look so definite. But you knew it was there all right, like seeing one piece of glass against another piece. Only there was movement in this, and faster than the fastest piece of machinery you ever set eyes on. And that dark thing in the centre was solider every second. I went closer still. And then the movement inside the column—like a glassy sort of pillar it was, though that doesn't quite give you the idea—stopped, though there was still a flickering and whirling on the outside. I could see that dark thing plainly now. It was a man—a sort of man."

Mr. Strenberry shut his eyes, put his hands up to them, and leaned forward on his elbows. In the quiet that followed, I could hear two fellows laughing in the bar outside. They were shouting something about a litter of pigs.

"He was a lightish greeny-blue in colour, this man," Mr. Strenberry continued, "and the same all over. He'd no clothes on, but I got the idea that he'd a very tough skin, leathery, y'know. It shone a bit too. He'd no hair on him at all, and didn't look as if he'd shaved it all off but as if he'd never had any. He was bigger than me, bigger than you, but no giant. I should say he was about the size and figure of one of your big heavyweight boxers—except for his head. He'd a tremendous head—and of course as bald as an egg—and a wonderful face. I can see it now. It was flattish, like some of the faces of the Egyptian statues in the British Museum, but what you noticed the minute you saw it, were the eyes. They were more like a beautiful woman's eyes than a man's, very big and soft, y'know, but bigger and softer than any woman's eyes—and such a colour, a kind of dark purple. Full of intelligence too. Blazing with it, I knew that at once. In fact, I could see that this man was as far above me as I am above a Hottentot. More highly developed, y'know. I'm not saying this because of what I learned afterwards. I saw it at once. You couldn't mistake it. This greeny-blue hairless man knew a million things we'd never heard of, and you could see it in his eyes. Well, there he was, and he stared at me and I stared at him."

"Go on," I said, for Mr. Strenberry had stopped and was now busy staring at me.

"This is the part you've got to try and understand," he cried, excitedly. "You see, this queer revolving cylinder of air was between us, and if it had been glass two feet thick it couldn't have separated us any better. I couldn't get at him. I don't say I tried very hard at first; I was too surprised and frightened. But I did try to get nearer after a minute or two, but I couldn't, and I can't possibly explain to you—no, not if I tried for a week—how I was stopped. Call it a transparent wall, if you like, but that doesn't give you the idea of it. Anyhow, it doesn't matter about me. The point is, he couldn't get out, and he obviously knew more about it than I did and he was trying desperately hard. He'd got some sort of little instrument in each hand—I could see them flash—and he kept bringing these together. He was terribly agitated. But he couldn't get out. He'd stopped the inside of this column revolving, as I said, but apparently he couldn't stop the outside, which was whirling and whirling just as fast as ever.

"I've asked myself thousands of times," Mr. Strenberry went on, more reflectively now, "what would have happened if he had got out. Would he have ruled the whole world, knowing so much more than we do? Or would these fools have shoved him into a cage, made a show of him, and finally killed him? Though I don't imagine they could have done that, not with this man. And then again, could he have existed at all once he got out? I don't mean just microbes and things, though they might easily have killed him off, because I don't suppose his body knew anything about such a germ-ridden atmosphere as ours. No, I don't mean that. This is the point. If he'd got out, really burst into this twentieth-century world, he might have stopped existing at all, just vanished into nothing, because after all this twentieth-century isn't just a date, it's also a condition, a state of things, and—you see—it doesn't include him. Though, of course, in a sense it does—or it did—because there he was, on the Heath that day."

"I'm afraid I don't follow all this," I said. "But go on, perhaps it will become clearer."

Mr. Strenberry leaned forward and fixed me with his little boiled eyes. "Don't you see, this man had come from the future? Fellows like H. G. Wells have always been writing about us taking a jump into the future, to have a look at our distant descendants, but of course we don't. We can't; we don't know enough. But what about them, taking a jump into the past, to have a look at *us*? That's far more likely, when you come to think of it. But I don't mean that is what this man was doing. He was trying to do more than that. If you ask me, they'd often taken a peep at us, and at our great-great-grandparents, and for that matter at our great-great-grandchildren too. But he wasn't just doing that. He was trying to get out, to escape from his own time altogether."

I drew in a long breath, then blew it out again, slowly.

"Don't you think I'm merely guessing that," cried Mr. Strenberry, "because I'm not. I *know*. And I know because he told me. I don't mean to say we talked. As a matter of fact, I did try shouting at him—asking him who he was and where he'd come from, and all that—but I don't think he heard

me, and if he did, he certainly didn't understand. But don't make any mistake—he saw me all right. He looked at me just as I looked at him. He made a sign or two, and might have made more if he hadn't been so busy with those instruments and so desperately agitated. He didn't shout at me, never opened his lips. But he *thought* at me. That's the only way I can describe it. Messages from him arrived in my head, and turned themselves into my own words, and even little pictures. And it was horrible—horrible, I tell you. Everything was finished, and he was trying to escape. The only way he could do it was to try and jump back into the past, out of the way. There wasn't much of the world left, fit to live in. Just one biggish island, not belonging to any of the continents we know—they'd all gone, long ago. I don't know the date. That never came through, and if it had, I don't suppose it would have told me much. But it was a long time ahead—perhaps twenty thousand years, perhaps fifty thousand, perhaps more—I don't know. What I do know is that this man wasn't anybody very important, just a sort of minor assistant in some kind of laboratory where they specialized in time experiments, quite a low-class fellow among his own kind, though he would have seemed a demigod to me and you. And I knew that while he was so terrified that he was frantic in his attempt to escape, at the same time he was ashamed of himself, too—felt he was a kind of dodger, you see. But even then, what was happening was so ghastly that he'd never hesitated at all. He had run to the laboratory or whatever it was, and just had time to jump back through the ages. He was in terror. He didn't show it as we might, but I tell you—his mind was *screaming*. Some place—a city, I think it was—had been entirely destroyed and everything else was going too, everything that had once been human. No words came into my mind to describe what it was that was destroying everything and terrifying him. Perhaps I hadn't any words that would fit in. All I got were some little pictures, very blurred, just like bits of a nightmare. There were great black things rolling about, just wiping everything out. Not like anything you've ever seen. You couldn't give them a shape."

Here Mr. Strenberry leaned further forward still, grasped my coat-sleeve, and lowered his voice.

"They weren't beasts or huge insects even," he whispered. "They weren't anything you could put a name to. I don't believe they belonged to this world at all. And something he thought rather suggested that too. They came from some other place, from another planet perhaps. Don't you see, it was all finished here. They were blotting it out, great rolling black things—oh, horrible! Just imagine what he felt, this man, who had just managed to escape from them, but now couldn't get out, into this world and time of ours. Because he couldn't, that was the awful thing. He tried and tried, but it couldn't be done. And he hadn't long to try either, I knew that. Because of what was happening at the other end, you see. I tell you, I stood there, looking at him, with his thoughts buzzing round my own head, and the sweat was streaming down my face. I was terrified too, in a panic. And then he was in an agony of fear, and so was I. It was all up. The inside of that col-

umn of air began revolving again, just as it had done when it first came, and then I couldn't see him distinctly. Only his eyes. Just those eyes, staring out of the swirl. And then, I saw something. I swear I did. Something black. Just a glimpse. That's all. A bit of one of those things, getting hold of him—the last man left. That's what it must have been, though how I came to see it, I don't quite know, but I've worked it out this way and that way, and it seems to me——”

“A-ha, who have we here?” cried a loud, cheerful voice. “How's things, Mr. Strenberry?”

Two red-faced men had just entered the room. They grinned at my companion, then winked at one another.

“A nasty day, Mr. Strenberry,” said the other fellow. “What do you say?”

Mr. Strenberry, who appeared to have crumpled up at their approach, merely muttered something in reply. Then, giving me a hasty glance, in which shame and despair and scorn were mingled, he suddenly rose and shuffled out of the room.

The two newcomers looked at one another, laughed, and then settled into their corner. The landlady appeared with their drinks. I stood up and looked out of the window. The downpour had dwindled to a few scattered drops, brightening in the sunlight.

“I seen you talking to Mr. Strenberry,” the landlady said to me. “Least, I seen him talking to you. Got him going, too, you did. He's a queer one, isn't he? Didn't I tell you he was a queer one? Telling you one of his tales, I'll be bound. Take no notice of him, mister. You can't believe a single word he says. We found that out long since. That's why he doesn't want to talk to us any more. He knows we've got a pinch of salt ready, Mr. Strenberry does.”

The Man Who Lived Backward

by Gelett Burgess

The idea of a man aging in reverse has been exemplified by such stories as F. Scott Fitzgerald's "Curious Case of Benjamin Button," a recent novel of the same title as this story, and a few other rare examples. Because they are so rare, we venture to say that almost any of them would be bound to show an individuality of approach. Gelett Burgess's story is no exception to this. It is decidedly different from the others we have seen, is markedly weird, and in fact can be called devilish in more ways than one.

LATE OCTOBER, it was—yes, Allhallow Eve, now I remember—that my Hungarian friend Dr. Kojer rang me up and asked me to come over to his place as soon as I possibly could.

"There is a woman here I want you to meet," he said. "But please don't ask any questions or make any definite statements or denials while she is here." And he told me he would explain later.

Dr. Kojer was much older than I; he was gruff and sarcastic; but I liked his scientific talk and sense of humor.

He liked me, I imagine, mainly because he found me a good listener.

The doctor was a specialist in pathology and did considerable consultative work, at enormous fees, but he saw few patients of his own. Most of his time was spent in private research—embryology, I believe, and biochemistry. Anyway, he kept a lot of rats and rabbits and even insects in the laboratory back of the living-rooms in his penthouse on the roof of a Park Avenue apartment building.

Kojer had become prominent a few years ago as one of the discoverers of the so-called chemical "inductor" which causes organs to change their form to that of transplanted tissues. He used to tell me that he could produce a rabbit with horns by such transformation of the cartilage of the ears. He was working too, I believe, on the rejuvenation of decayed teeth by a similar inductor process—something he needed badly himself.

Kojer was built like an oak tree—rugged trunk and thick limbs. His heavy black hair and heavy black mustache made him look something like Stalin, the peasant type; only Stalin hasn't such black teeth.

As I live near by, I was over at his place within fifteen minutes. I had to wait awhile, though, after all. I sat down in his modernistic waiting-room and picked up a magazine. . . . The office door finally opened. The Doctor ushered out an elderly, handsome, white-haired woman, followed by a Negro maid with a baby in her arms. The elderly woman had sharp, aristocratic features; and despite her old-fashioned blue gown to her ankles, she was a figure of distinction.

The Doctor perplexed me by introducing me as his assistant, and said that I might be able to help Mrs. Keaf while he was studying her case. It was like a scene in a movie where I was an actor who knew nothing of the continuity. I mumbled something, and wondered what was the matter with that baby. It had the strangest strained expression, and it gazed at me with an intensity that was disconcerting.

The old lady, however, didn't seem much interested in me. She directed the maid to wait in the foyer, and her look was agonized as she turned immediately to Dr. Kojer.

"But you will operate, Doctor, won't you? You must do something, and very soon. There's such a short time left—only a few weeks. Oh, Doctor, I beg of you! I'm desperate. I don't know what will happen if—" And she began to sob.

Dr. Kojer said: "All right, Mrs. Keaf, all right. I'll see what I can do." And he led her gently toward the door and closed it slowly behind her.

He came back to me with a queer look on his face, and stood with his hands in his pockets, nodding his head.

"How old would you say that baby was?" he asked me.

I said I didn't know much about babies. Six weeks or so, I thought.

The Doctor slowly took a pipe from his pocket, filled it, lighted it. Then he said, watching me with a quizzical look:

"That child was born in 1785—at least, that's what I'm told."

"1785!" I supposed it must be one of his jokes. "Why, that would make him—let's see—one hundred and sixty years old," I said.

The Doctor grinned and nodded. "And to make it more interesting, that baby is worth some twenty millions."

I didn't know how to take it. "You mean," I said, "that he has inherited all that money?"

"No," said Dr. Kojer, "he is said to have earned it himself, dealing in real estate." And he asked me if I had ever heard of the Wicet Realty Corporation.

I knew that the company owned almost as much land in New York as the Astor estate; and I said, still uncertain what he meant, that the child might perhaps be the great-grandson, or even great-great-grandson of the original Levi Wicet, who founded the company.

Dr. Kojer still had that enigmatical smile. "That child *is* the original Levi," he said. "I have Mrs. Keaf's word for it."

The idea was ridiculous. I laughed and said: "Then why isn't he an old man instead of a baby?"

"That's just what I'd like to know," said the Doctor. And he informed me that the Wicet Corporation had been kept in the family for over a hundred years, and was now controlled by three of Levi's great-great-grandsons, three brothers. "And that's another queer twist to the Wicet story," he added. "Levi's descendants have always named their sons anagrams of Levi."

"Anagrams?" I said, and I laughed, and said that then probably one of them must have been named *Evil*.

"That is so," said the Doctor; "only, they accent it on the last syllable, *Eveel*. Their father's name was *Vile*, pronounced *Veelay*. Further back in the family line, I am told, were *Viel*, *Ivel*, *Eliv*, *Ilev*, and *Elvi*. They are certainly proud of old Levi."

"Who," I said, "you tell me is young Levi." Doctor Kojer grinned and showed his blackened teeth. I was impatient at this mystification. "It's impossible!" I said.

The Doctor chuckled and then took me into his office, the walls of which were lined with books. We had had many interesting talks there. I dropped into a red leather chair, and he sat down behind his fat-topped desk, leaned back, took off his tortoiseshell goggles and cleaned them carefully.

"A man's scientific education," he said in a professional tone, "is said to be gauged by the way he uses the word *impossible*. I have a book here with some four thousand engravings. They are illustrations of the microscopic sections of every part of the human body. The exploration of the secret corners of the earth, my dear sir, has been child's play, compared with the investigation of man's body and the operation of his organs. We have as yet hardly done more than to guess at the mysteries of anatomy, function, repair and growth. Why, chemical histology, as late as 1875 was regarded as a vague, unprofitable theorizing. Even Dr. Oliver Wendell Holmes had to wait twenty-five years to have the simplest theories of antiseptic surgery accepted. The X-ray though, radium, vitamins and hormones, television and the exploded atom all show that we've only begun to understand nature, and that new discoveries will continue to amaze us. The story of this baby appears preposterous at first sight, I admit; but it may possibly open up a new field of research—who knows? You can't reject anything as incredible, nowadays."

"Well," I said, impatiently, "then let's have the fairy-tale."

"Mrs. Keaf," said the Doctor, "asserts that the baby, Levi Wicet, is living backward, so to speak, and has been for the past eighty years. Growing younger, that is, every day."

I said that, so far as I knew, there was nothing in natural science that suggested the possibility of such a regression, or devolution.

Dr. Kojer knocked the ashes out of his pipe and refilled it. "What would you say," he said between puffs, as he lit it, "if a mother were born after her daughter?" And he grinned whimsically at me.

"I'd say it was impossible," I answered.

The Doctor laughed. "There you go again, you scientific ignoramus! Well, now, consider the lowly aphides, commonly known as plant lice."

"Yes, I know," said I. "They serve as cows for the ants to milk."

He nodded. "After a first fertilization by the male," he said, "the females go on all summer producing young females, one after the other parthenogenetically, by a process like internal budding. And the young begin to produce daughters immediately, and so on and on, and so rapidly that if there is any complication which retards a mother's birth, her daughter goes right ahead and is born first. It's a fairly frequent occurrence in insect life."

It was a paradox new to me, and I laughed and said that many a woman would be glad to be younger than her daughter. Then I said: "Does all that mean that you believe that baby is one hundred and sixty years old, Dr. Kojer?"

He gazed up at the ceiling. "Mrs. Keaf brought the child here first about a year ago," he said. "It had few teeth and weighed about twenty pounds. It looked to be about fourteen months old."

I asked him if he was sure it was the same baby as the one she brought today.

"I thought then," said the Doctor, "that she was probably insane, and I really never expected to see her again, or I'd undoubtedly have taken the kid's fingerprints."

"Well," I said, "suppose, for the sake of the argument, that the child is actually getting younger every day. What'll happen when he's only one day old?"

"That's what's tormenting the poor lady," the Doctor said. "Levi Wicet is said to have been born Dec. 1st, 1785. And Dec. 1st, 1945, is only a few weeks off. Do you wonder that I am a bit interested? I thought that you, too, as a writer, might be interested."

"What does she want you to do?" I asked. "She spoke of an operation. Perhaps she has some idea of doing something with the pituitary gland. That's supposed to regulate growth, isn't it? Is it ever operated on?"

Dr. Kojer grunted. "Take it out, you mean, and sew it back again upside down onto the infundibulum? Though how you're going to get at it would be a problem. It's way down inside the skull, you know—not to mention operating on a month-old baby. Mrs. Keaf may have some thought of hormones—or radium, for all I know. She's been to pediatricians all over—here and abroad, and they've all laughed at her."

"And you didn't?"

"I only laugh at my own jokes," he said, with a grin. And then he told me the story Mrs. Keaf had told him.

Levi Wicet, she'd said, came to this country in the year 1800, when he was fifteen, with his parents, who were Dutch. They bought a farm on Lenox Hill, then in the country a few miles out of New York. After Levi had served in the War of 1812 as a marine on board the sloop-of-war *Hornet*, he went into business, buying real estate on the outskirts of town and

turning them into profits as New York grew northward. He married, and twenty years later took his son into partnership. They were shrewd dealers and made money hand over fist. At the age of seventy, Levi retired from the business, immensely rich. Mrs. Keaf says he traveled abroad a good deal, and it was in 1865, when he was eighty, she says, that the strange thing happened which was to make him different from any human being who had ever lived. In Vienna he fell down some stairs, and was taken to a private hospital.

Just what took place there Levi never knew. He was unconscious when he arrived, and wasn't aware of what treatment was given him during his stay. All he could remember, when he told the story to Mrs. Keaf, forty-five years later, was that a strange-looking doctor named Santa, with a hooked nose and black beard, and dressed always in black, seemed to take great interest in his case and kept coming to see him after he had left the hospital. Levi assumed that his skull had been fractured; but as he improved steadily, he made no effort to find out what had been done. He knew, though, that he felt better than he had for years.

"But who is this Mrs. Keaf?" I asked, "and how does she happen to have the baby?"

Dr. Kojer didn't know exactly what her relation was to Levi Wicet. She told him that she had first met Levi when she was thirty years old. He told her at that time that he was thirty-five; but that was, of course, his regressive age. In point of fact, he was then actually one hundred and twenty-five. Mrs. Keaf didn't see him again till he came to her fifteen years ago.

"Being then one hundred and forty-five years old," I remarked.

"But," said the Doctor, "being, regressively, a boy of fifteen and terrified as to what was happening to him. She has taken care of him ever since."

I asked the Doctor how I came into it, and what he wanted me to do.

The Doctor became more serious then, and he explained that his discoveries and the disputes about the priority of them over other claimants in the matter of the much-discussed "inductor" tissue, had aroused considerable jealousy and rancor amongst his colleagues. They had denied his theories and questioned his experiments. And so he suspected that this regressive-baby story might be a kind of hoax arranged to make a fool of him. The woman, he said, might have been hired by his professional rivals to lead his curiosity on, and told to bring a different baby the second time, and they hoped he might betray his credulity and lack of scientific insight by taking her seriously and following up the case. And so, he said, he preferred not to see Mrs. Keaf again; but the mystery was otherwise so provocative that he would like me to keep track of the child and report to him.

Well, the idea was too fascinating to refuse; and I agreed to undertake the mission; then his telephone bell rang, and he was asked to go to Hoboken on an urgent consultation, and he had to hurry right off. He said he'd give me further details about Mrs. Keaf the next day.

When I got back home that afternoon I couldn't get the darned thing out

of my mind. If the story were true—which of course it couldn't be, I thought—just when, I wondered, did Levi Wicet first discover that he was growing younger? Many men of eighty are as hale and vigorous as others at seventy, and so he mightn't have realized for ten years that he was regressing, perhaps even not for twenty years. He would then feel and appear like a man of sixty; but knowing that he was actually one hundred years old, wouldn't he be then convinced that something uncanny had happened to him? At eighty, too, he must have been either bald or gray, but as his hair came in again or darkened, he might have thought it merely an extraordinary rejuvenation without suspecting that he was living backward.

When he had got back to fifty, however, he must have been sure and he must have begun to dread the exposure of his state to his acquaintances. What could they think of him, knowing him to be one hundred and ten years old? At that venerable age men don't travel, dance, play tennis, or do any of the things he must have felt capable of doing. How could he rejoice in his new lease of life if he became notorious as a phenomenon? But how could he keep his monstrous secret? Such speculations kept me awake most of the night, and I got up determined to find out what I could for myself and as soon as possible.

When I phoned in the morning, Dr. Kojer's nurse told me that he hadn't yet returned, and she couldn't reach him as he had already left the hospital where the consultation had taken place.

I asked her then if she could give me the address of Mrs. Keaf whom I had met in the Doctor's office.

"I'm sorry," she said, "but I haven't it in my file. But perhaps I can find it among the papers in the Doctor's desk and you might call me back later."

But somehow I couldn't wait. The thing had so got hold of me that in the forenoon I went downtown to the office of the Wicet Realty Corporation, and asked to see one of the partners—any one of them. After I had sent in my card, the girl returned to ask me what I wanted to see Mr. Wicet about. I told her it was concerning a Mrs. Keaf, and she returned and immediately showed me into a spacious mahogany-paneled room with heavy Oriental rugs that made it seem more like a luxurious home than an office. In the center of one wall was the portrait of a handsome white haired gentleman in a black stock and wide stand-up collar, a costume of the 1850's. And directly under it seated at a huge glass-topped desk was Mr. Ilve Wicet, who somewhat resembled the portrait. The same high, narrow forehead and bushy eyebrows, the same tight crooked line of the mouth. His face was harder, though, and more ingrowing. Without rising he pointed with a pencil to a chair.

I said that I wished to inquire about Mrs. Keaf, who was, I understood, a relative of his.

He said: "Oh, Aunt Avelia, I suppose you mean. What about her?"

"Could you tell me where she lives?" I asked.

He pursed his lips and inspected me for a moment. "I have no idea," he said. "I haven't seen her for years." He put the tips of his fingers together. "Aunt Avelia should be about seventy, now, if indeed she is still living."

"I saw her yesterday," I said.

"What?" he exclaimed, and an expression of anxiety came into his hard, cold face. "Where did you see her, may I ask?"

When I had told him about meeting her in Dr. Kojer's office, he held up a finger. "Wait a minute, please," And he spoke into an inter-office telephone, asking that "Mr. Vlei" come immediately. Then he informed me, with a somewhat more gracious manner, that the family had been trying for some time to locate Mrs. Keaf, as it was necessary to see her on important business.

Mr. Vlei Wicet, when he came in, I found to be short, stout and evidently younger than Ilve; but he had the same tight-lipped look. He stood facing me, twiddling a card in his fingers while the two brothers questioned me. They asked about Mrs. Keaf's appearance and if she seemed ill—or, they hinted, perhaps a bit mentally unbalanced? I made vague replies, wondering at their manner which implied more than a mere interest in an elderly relative. They seemed somewhat angry, I thought, or at least disturbed. The elder brother, Ilve, still sat at his desk rubbing his chin. Finally he asked in a casual enough tone:

"Was Mrs. Keaf alone?"

I didn't like either of the men, and I suspected them of—I don't know what. But I decided to see what would come of it anyway, and so I told them that Mrs. Keaf had had a baby with her.

Ilve looked at his brother Vlei meaningly, and asked how old a child.

I said about six weeks, and they both scowled.

Vlei said something to Ilve in a low tone; and then, after thanking me for my information, he rose, indicating clearly enough that the interview was at an end.

I lingered long enough, however, to speak of the portrait over his head. I said it was evidently by a master, and asked if it was perhaps an ancestor.

Ilve glanced up at it. "Levi Wicet," he said, "my great-great-grandfather, the founder of this company."

I remarked, inanely enough, but I was watching him closely, that the handsome old gentleman must have lived a long time ago.

"Of course," said Vlei, "naturally. He died in 1885, just after his hundredth birthday."

Ilve was still standing, tapping the desk with his fingers a bit nervously. He nodded assent and they said nothing more. In the rather awkward pause I took my leave.

In the outer waiting-room a man was sitting in a chair. Something about him attracted my attention—something queer. I didn't know what it was

till I suddenly recalled what Dr. Kojer had told me about that Viennese surgeon, Dr. Santa, who was supposed to have treated Levi Wicet after his accident, back in 1865. A strange man, Levi had said, with a hooked nose and a black spade beard, and who always dressed in black. It was a mere coincidence of course; but this foreign-looking man, curiously enough, answered perfectly to that description. With his saturnine and rather sinister smile, as he sat there stiffly, he had, somehow, a peculiar magnetism as of some suppressed power. I said to myself, as I went out, that in the proper costume and make-up, I could imagine him playing the part of *Mephistopheles* in "Faust." He seemed, by the way the receptionist girl treated him, to be a messenger of some sort. She called him Elvid.

In the afternoon I phoned again to Dr. Kojer's office. His nurse told me that he hadn't yet come in, and she was a little nervous about him. She had found the address of Mrs. Keaf, though; it was out in Riverdale. She wasn't listed in the telephone directory, but probably had a private number, as she seemed to be very well off. Then the nurse added something that worried me a little:

"A Mr. Wicet," she said, "of the Wicet Realty Corporation, rang me up a little while ago, and he asked for Mrs. Keaf's address, too."

"You didn't give it to him, did you?" I asked.

She hesitated and seemed embarrassed. "Why, yes, I did," she said. "He told me Mrs. Keaf was a near relative of his. Wasn't it all right to give the address?"

Well, after all, it was really none of my affair, and I knew nothing about the man. So I said, "All right," but I decided to lose no time getting out to Riverdale to see the old lady. I was detained, however by a caller—he wanted to publish my next book—and I put the matter off till I could get a little work done on my manuscript.

The next morning when I took up my paper I was shocked to read of an automobile accident in which Dr. Kojer had been killed in Jersey City. And so it wasn't until after his funeral that I found the time to go to Riverdale.

Mrs. Keaf lived in an old yellow two-story Colonial house with columns and a wide portico back from a garden above the street. It was a dignified mansion amongst the elms that you might notice and think looked rather romantic.

I was shown by the Negro maid into a beautiful little white-and-gold reception room, and there I found the old lady, very straight, very correct and aristocratic, in lavender and lace. She was in a highly nervous state. She had heard of Dr. Kojer's death, and she said she was hoping I would come. Except for her two servants, she was alone with the baby; and she seemed to want a man's company and advice to support her in what she said was a mysterious danger she feared was imminent. And then she told me something that somewhat disturbed me also.

A man had called that forenoon, she said, to inquire about somebody

named Taylor. She was sure that it was a mere excuse to see her, or perhaps the baby.

"Perhaps I'm a bit superstitious," the old lady confessed, "but I feel that man's coming as—well, as an evil sign of some kind. You know, I didn't tell Dr. Kojer, but there's a tradition in the Wicet family that the original Levi—my baby here—was not really the son of the man he called father. That man, Phyno Wicet, lived with his wife—they had no children—in Antwerp. Well, one dark, stormy night, so the story runs, the Wicets were coming home from church in the rain when an old man stopped them on a corner by the cathedral. He had a hooked nose and a black beard, and he was all in black—a strange-looking man; and he carried a baby, wrapped up, in his arms. He went up to Frau Wicet, put the baby in her arms and said, 'Keep him till I come,' and then disappeared. Well, the couple grew fond of the child—and he was apparently only a few days old—and adopted him, giving him the name Levi. The little boy, they say, had a will of his own, when he grew larger; and when it clashed with his father's, old Phyno would call him a child of the Devil."

As I didn't want to alarm Mrs. Keaf further, I said nothing about that foreign-looking hook-nosed bearded man I had seen in the Wicets' office waiting-room—the one who had been called Elvid. I promised to come out to see her every day or so, if she wished. There was a stable on the place where she kept an ancient Pierce-Arrow, and it was there I kept my own car when I called. Her two servants lived in an upper floor of the stable.

Mrs. Keaf seemed grateful for my sympathy; Levi's birthday was rapidly approaching, and she dreaded what might happen. Her suspense was the harder to bear because although December 1st was called his birthday, the exact date was of course unknown, as he was a kind of foundling. It might be a week or so earlier or later.

It wasn't merely a terror of the supernatural, however, that was haunting the old lady. She was afraid of her nephews, Ilve, Vlei and Evil.

"For a long time," she said, "they have been fearing an exposure of the fact that Levi is still alive. They know it would make an unconscionable amount of talk. If the papers got hold of the story, you can imagine what they would do with it. It would be a sensation that might even ruin their business, and Vlei's political chances, for he is now trying for election as Senator." And Mrs. Keaf went on to tell me that back in 1885 that the Wicets had held a family conclave and discussed the anomalous position in which they were placed. Levi was then one hundred years old, but seemed only sixty, and was unmistakably growing younger all the time. And so he agreed to disappear and live abroad, and even have himself reported dead.

"I would never have anything to do with my nephews," Mrs. Keaf said; "I despise them. But after Levi came to me for protection, fifteen years ago, they must have heard of it somehow. They have written to me repeatedly, but I never answered. They have tried to see me—they have even accused me of having an illegitimate child. They have offered me money to give

Levi up to them. They offered first twenty-five thousand dollars, then one hundred thousand. I don't need to tell you, I'm sure, that nothing they could offer me would be the slightest temptation for me to part with Levi; but in any case what money I have of my own, not to speak of what he brought me, is more than sufficient for us."

She put her handkerchief to her eyes. "What they would do with the child," she said brokenly, "if they had him, I can't imagine. I don't think of it. . . . So far, I have managed to keep my whereabouts secret from them. But if Levi should die"—and here poor Mrs. Keaf almost broke down—"I don't know what investigations would be made by the authorities, or how they'd take my explanation. And all that publicity, I suppose, is what my nephews are anxious to avoid. But if I should die—oh, I don't know, I don't know what would become of—" And then she was sobbing pitifully.

The last thing I'd have wished was to become involved in a family affair like this, but the old lady's anxiety and distress impelled me to give up my work and devote most of my time to her in Riverdale. She seemed pathetically grateful at having some one to share her trouble, and was relieved somewhat in being able to talk about it. And so it was in our conversations during those sad November days that, bit by bit, I was able to patch together most of the epic of Levi Wicet's strange life, and her own brief part in it.

She must have been beautiful when she was young, for, with the shy, pathetic vanity of a woman who has lost her looks, she mentioned that she had been chosen to lead the daisy chain procession at her Vassar graduation. She was soon married to a wealthy broker, Rial Keaf, and soon made a widow. She was thirty when she took a trip abroad.

It was in Paris, at one of those gay, bustling, cosmopolitan sidewalk cafés on the Avenue des Champs Elysées that she was introduced, one June afternoon, to a handsome, spirited and clever chap known as Monsieur Salia. There must have been something in his air and glances that day more potent than the *apéritif* she sipped, for she hadn't met him many times—he followed her persistently—before she was calling him by his first name, Dirth, and she was soon head over heels in love with him, and he with her. He was at that time, so he told her, thirty-five years old. In a month they were engaged to be married. Avelia and he lived in the clouds.

And then came sudden disaster to all her hopes of happiness. One night, after a day of amorous intoxication, he confessed to her that Salia was an assumed name. He felt her deep sympathy and he longed for a confidant. He told her the story of his mysterious treatment in Vienna—then forty-five years ago—and how he had since then steadily grown younger. But it wasn't only the fact, atrocious though it was, that he was actually one hundred and twenty-five years old, that appalled her.

It was the discovery, when he had told her his real name was Levi Wicet (her maiden name was Avelia Wicet), that this charming, handsome young man she loved was her great-grandfather. Ridiculous though it may sound, the situation was to her shocking. It was sickening. He was the lover of her

dreams suddenly made horrible. Every hope for happiness she had had was blasted. She hardly dared touch his hand.

"Levi kept insisting," she told me tearfully one day, as we sat watching the baby (the very person she was talking of) "that our consanguinity was too slight to matter. He said that first cousins could marry although they had fifty per cent of the same blood, while I had only one-eighth of his. But to me," she said, "it was unnatural, it was sinful; I couldn't even think of it. We had a desperate time of it; my heart was broken—for I loved him, oh, I loved him so! I couldn't help loving him, even when I knew. But finally I broke away from him and came home. I didn't see him again for nineteen years."

I said, I remember, that apart from the blood relationship, the idea of seeing him steadily grow younger would have been unbearable. In ten years when she was forty, he would have been twenty-five. And in ten years more, when she was fifty, he would be only fifteen.

"Oh, it wasn't that," Mrs. Keaf protested. "I would have been glad to protect and comfort him, for I knew how he was suffering and would suffer, more and more. Do you realize what that child there has been through? It's bad enough to grow old, I know that well enough—to lose your looks and charm and vigor, year by year. But to know that you're growing *younger* all the time, inevitably, to feel something terrible coming, you don't know what, but certainly helplessness, dependence on others, and your mind growing childish—and then infancy—and then what? It must have been terrifying to him. Even when he came to me, when he was back to fifteen, when he was too young to realize what was happening to him, it was horrible. It is horrible even now that he is a baby. I can hardly bear to look at him. He seems to sense that something is wrong."

And then she told me more of Levi Wicet's strange history. After that family council in 1885, when he was a hundred years old, Levi went to England, he had told Avelia, where for ten years he led a gayish life in a Surrey country house he had bought. He knew that if it were known that he was a centenarian he would become unpleasantly notorious and so, apparently in his fifties, he adopted the name of Eli Busgo and avoided all his former English friends.

One day in 1890 a dissolute young man, Live Wicet, met this charming Mr. Busgo at a hunt party in a house near Betchworth. That night, after several rounds of drinks he said to a girl he was pursuing, "By Jove, think of the old beggar riding to hounds at a hundred and five! How do I know?" he snickered. "Why, he's my own great-great-grandfather, by Jove." The girl told an intimate friend, and the tale soon spread all over the country.

Levi, alarmed at the rumor, moved to Vienna where he hoped to escape notice. There he changed his name again and his family being traditionally fond of anagrams, he was there known as Count Lei Felsa. In Vienna, he afterwards told Avelia, he tried to find Dr. Santa, but as it was then some

thirty-five years since the Doctor had treated him, it wasn't surprising that his quest was fruitless.

Levi was a rich man. To avoid being traced or identified through banking offices he had converted his entire fortune into U. S. Government coupon bonds. In Vienna he must have begun fully to realize the fate that was upon him, and he sought to forget it in gaiety and pleasure. The first year there, he told Avelia, he spent over two million dollars. In appearance and in temperament he was now a man in his forties, and since he was handsome, distinguished and prodigal, as time passed even his new friends began to comment on his strangely changeless appearance.

In a gambling casino, one day, where Levi often played heavily, an old Englishman, bald and feeble, tottering on a cane, said to him:

"My word, sir, aren't you Mr. Busgo? I used to know you in Dorking, remember? You bought some of my Tamworth pigs. By gad, sir, you look twenty years younger than you did then. How d'you do it?"

Levi said, coldly, "My name, sir, is Lei Felsa. I'm sorry to say I don't know you."

And that week he packed up and moved to Paris, where some ten years later he met the beautiful Avelia. . . .

After that unhappy love affair, doubly tragic for Levi who was in such dire need of a friend and confidant, he seems for several years to have plunged into the most remarkable dissipation and extravagance. He wandered all over the world seeking distraction and forgetfulness of his doom. Avelia received letters from him, she told me, from India, from South Africa and the Argentine. When the first World War broke out in 1914, he engaged as a driver in the American Ambulance Corps under the name of Eli Drauf, in the hope, he wrote Avelia, that he would be killed. He had given his age as twenty-nine, and he displayed such daring and devotion to duty, even fool-hardiness under fire that it was impossible to suspect that he was, in reality, a man of one hundred and twenty-nine. In 1920 he wrote to Avelia:

When I think of what may happen—will certainly happen—in the coming years it seems to me that my only course should be suicide—if, indeed, I don't perish of loneliness. Now, when I am in what should be a glorious renewal of my youth, with the ardor and energy of a man of twenty-five, with all a young man's emotions and desires and ambitions, and money for any kind of pleasure, the men all friendly and the women all fond—all is dust and ashes in my mouth. How shall I live when I get back to boyhood, to childhood, to infancy? How shall I conceal the fact that I am a monstrosity and a marvel for all to wonder at, to talk about, perhaps to jeer at?

It was not till he had regressed to the age of fifteen, however, that he appealed to Avelia, the only one whom he could trust to keep his secret. Levi was in a sorry plight. His teeth, he found, were reversing their original development, and gradually receding into the gums. And as his first teeth

had of course gone when he was a child, he was forced to live on milk and soft foods, and found it was growing harder to speak distinctly. He had tried, he wrote her, to have dentures made to fit his little mouth, but as he appeared to be a normal adolescent, dentists had only laughed at him, patted him on the shoulder and told him to be patient till his second teeth appeared.

One day, in 1930, it was, while Avelia Keaf was living in Brookline, Mass., she answered the doorbell to find a weeping, wretched boy of fifteen asking for refuge. His memory of the past was growing faint but he still had intelligence to understand his deplorable condition. He had with him in a bag a bundle of United States bonds, some of them long past maturity.

Avelia still loved him, but it was now a kind of maternal love based on pity. From then on he lived with her and was passed off as her adopted son.

There were a few years of melancholy happiness for the two. "Until he had got back to five years old," she told me, "he was constantly asking me what was the matter with him and why he was growing smaller all the time. I had to prevent his going with other children who might have discovered that there was something queer about him and talk about him, and he had a lonely time of it."

I live and Vlei Wicet managed, after a while, to learn where Avelia lived and that she had little Levi with her. From that time on she led a life of anxiety and dread. "We moved from Brookline to Philadelphia," she told me, "and then to Washington, for I was always hoping that in some new city I'd be able to find some doctor who could solve the mystery of Levi's case. But my nephews always found out, somehow, after a while, where I was and I had to move again."

I asked her if there was any possibility of the Wicets going to law to get possession of the child.

"Oh, no, I think not," she said. "They would be afraid to, for then the whole story would have to come out. Anyway, neither of us can establish any legal claim to guardianship. We can't even prove his identity. He has no papers, and I doubt if his own testimony—that is, when he was still able to talk intelligently—would have been accepted as valid."

As the days passed Avelia grew more nervous and overwrought. I myself was somewhat uneasy because, one day, while driving out to Riverdale, I had passed, just before I got to Mrs. Keaf's house, an old-fashioned Ford closed coupé, one of those square-front model T's you haven't seen for years. It was coming in toward New York, and in it I had seen, or thought I had seen, driving it, a man in a black beard unpleasantly like that strange-looking man Elvid, I had seen in the waiting-room of the Wicets' office. It disturbed me so, in fact, that I took one of Mrs. Keaf's guestrooms to stay with her there for a while, greatly to her relief. I saw the baby, of course, every day, an unhappy little creature, I thought, almost always crying, and by the end of November it was evident that little Levi had grown noticeably smaller. By the 28th we found he now weighed only ten pounds.

The baby slept in a cot bed in the same room with Mrs. Keaf, who hardly left him out of her sight, and as the first of December drew near she was exhausted and miserable from her vigil. It was all I could do to keep up her spirits—in fact it was all I could do to pretend to be cheerful myself in that strain of waiting for—what?

One night Avelia and I were sitting in a little sewing-room between the room I occupied and her bedroom where little Levi was sleeping. All the afternoon the sky had been overcast with heavy dark clouds; it was what, in California, they call "earthquake weather," close and lowering; and toward nine o'clock a thunderstorm had broken over the house. Avelia sat by the window looking out gloomily through the swaying branches of the trees into the darkness and the pouring rain.

"It always reminds me of *Paradise Lost*," she said, "the thunder and lightning and the wind. "The floors of heaven ring to the roar of an angel onset!" she quoted. "Milton must have believed in the powers of darkness," she said, "or he couldn't have described so well the fall of Lucifer to the bottomless pit, to become the ruler of Hell." Then she looked at me with a queer expression, and asked me if I believed in a personal Satan.

I told her that I considered him merely as symbolic of the evil part of human nature.

"But they believed in him in the Middle Ages," she said. "Didn't they have carved gargoyles and devils and imps on all the cathedrals? They thought that the Evil One was almost as powerful as God, and tried that way to propitiate him." And then she half-laughed nervously and asked me if I thought she was losing her mind.

I reassured her as well as I could and then she told me seriously that she thought she had seen Satan himself. He was that black-bearded man who had called at the house on a pretended errand, she said. I tried to laugh it off, but she sat there shaking her head in silence.

Suddenly, she asked me if I had ever heard of the Wandering Jew.

Of course I knew the legend of Cartaphilus (Ahasuerus, she corrected me), who had reviled Jesus as he was led out to execution, and to whom the Christ had said, "Thou shalt walk the earth till my return." And Avelia said she believed the Jew was really Satan and he was still wandering on among men and creating evil.

There was an exceptionally vivid flash of lightning just then, and through the crashing reverberations of the thunder and the slashing of the rain against the windowpanes I heard her cry, hysterically:

"There's someone out there in the garden! I saw someone move under a tree when that lightning lit up the place. Someone all in black!"

It didn't seem possible that anyone would be out in such a tempest, and I tried to quiet her, but she kept gazing out waiting for every flash. I told her I'd go outside and look about to see if I could find anyone, or I'd call her chauffeur in the stable, but she seized my arm and sobbed:

"No, no, don't leave me! I'm afraid! Don't leave me!"

Suddenly she got up and went into her room. In a moment she returned. "No, he's all right," she gasped. "Little Levi's sleeping right through all this tumult," and she seemed somewhat pacified and sat down again with me. But I saw that she was breathing with difficulty, and she held her hand to her heart.

And then again she was staring at me. I hope I shall never again have to see such terror as was in her eyes.

"What was that?" she asked faintly. "Did you hear anything? I thought I heard a noise."

Then, without waiting for my answer she rose and almost staggered into her room. Before I could follow her I heard a heavy sound, but whether it was distant thunder or caused by a fall, I couldn't tell. The next moment I found her lying on the floor in her room. I stooped over her and she stared at me with glassy eyes. She tried to speak. I thought she said something about the window, but I couldn't make out what it was, her voice was so faint, and I lifted her up and laid her on her bed beside the cot where the baby was sleeping. Then I ran downstairs and out through the pouring rain to the stable to call the maid.

When we got back to the room, Avelia Keaf was dead. The window was open. Little Levi was gone.

I looked at my watch. It was midnight. And it was now Dec. 1st, 1945. Just one hundred and sixty years since a strange bearded man in black had put into the arms of a Dutch woman in Antwerp, a newborn babe.

And despite the present tragedy and mystery of this stormy night, the question somehow came to me: Where had that strange man, so long ago, got that baby—who now had so inexplicably disappeared?

Something From Above

by Donald Wandrei

What with flying saucers, falling blocks of ice, and such like becoming matters of everyday occurrence, this story now seems to be quite a likely tale. The aviator who saw something while piloting his plane, the farmer who found something odd in his fields, the curious rain of inexplicable substances, all of which are incidents in this fascinating tale, have seemingly come true in these hectic days. Which either proves that fact is no stranger than fiction, but merely slower, or else that we are indeed being intruded upon by "something from above" and that if the Iron Age is drawing to an end, the Science-Fiction Age may well be beginning.

1. The Red Snow

IN THEMSELVES, the events had all the horror of a nightmare, but a nightmare can be explained so that it ceases to oppress one's mind. The incidents at Norton in western Minnesota were different, for now they may never be completely explained. It is not so much the things we know that terrify us as it is the things we do not know, the things that break all known laws and rules, the things that come upon us unaware and shatter the pleasant dream of our little world. The occurrence at Norton was of such a kind, a horror of so appalling and incredible a nature that no one concerned will ever be able to forget the day of madness.

Everything that might have any bearing on the explanation is included in the following narrative in order that the truth may not be overlooked through omission. It may be that some facts have not yet come to light, and perhaps there have been included a few details that do not really pertain to the affair. The incidents themselves may not be in the right order. If further information should be possessed by any one, the narrative will gladly be corrected, for anything that may help to explain will be eagerly welcomed by scientists and public alike. We walk in darkness with phantoms and specters we know not of, and our little world plunges blindly through abysses toward a goal of which we have no conception. That thought itself is a blow at our beliefs and comprehension. We used to content ourselves by thinking we knew all about our world, at least; but now it is different,

and we wonder if we really know anything, or if there can be safety and peace anywhere in the wide universe.

The phenomenon with which we are here concerned began with the blotting out of the stars, an astronomical riddle which was observed by three watchers: Professor Grill of Harvard; his assistant, Mr. Thorndyke; and an amateur astronomer in California, Mr. Nelson. An odd feature of the observation is that the two Easterners swear the blotting out occurred far down on the western horizon, whereas Mr. Nelson reported that it took place near Saturn. Are we to believe that one observation was inaccurate, or that there actually were two simultaneous phenomena in different parts of the heavens? In the light of former and after events, the latter conclusion seems more likely. Furthermore, Mr. Nelson's observation, made on the night of March 28, is apparently connected with one he had made on the preceding night. According to a note he had sent in to the Mount Wilson Observatory, he had been idly examining the planet Saturn on the night of March 27. The atmosphere was exceptionally clear, the observation perfect. The rings were so plain and the planet so impressive in its peculiar way that he stayed on watching it minute after minute. Thus it was that the unexpected happened even while he watched. Shortly after one o'clock, there appeared on its surface a spot of such blinding, dazzling radiance that he thought his vision must have been strained and he was merely seeing things. He looked away for a minute; when he resumed his watch at the eyepiece of his telescope, he discovered that where the spot of incandescent brilliance had been was now a dot of blackness. As he watched it in curiosity, he saw it grow lighter and lighter until finally the planet presented its normal appearance. Mr. Nelson might have ignored the matter altogether if he had not had sufficient scientific training to respect the cardinal principle of never overlooking any fact or data. Thus it was that he wrote down his observation and duly sent it in.

The blotting out of the stars on the night of March 28 was an even stranger phenomenon. In the act of training his telescope on Saturn again to look for a reappearance of the radiant spot, Mr. Nelson noticed a star suddenly flicker out and return, another vanish and shine bright again an instant later. He thought at first that he must be the victim of an optical illusion, but he kept on observing, and saw that the stars which disappeared and shone again were in a straight line which he computed to lie in the general path between Saturn and the Earth. It was a curious spectacle to watch, according to Nelson. It was just as if you were strolling down a street at noon, and stopped to look at a diamond on a black plush cushion in a jeweller's window; and then all at once the diamond wasn't there, even while you were looking at it; and then suddenly there was the diamond again, sparkling as ever. It was not as if a solid body had come between you and the diamond, but rather as if something invisible had crossed your field of vision, something you could not see but which intercepted light-rays. The observation of the two Harvard astronomers duplicated Nelson's, but they said that the blotting out took place down on the western horizon, far

away from Saturn. Odder still is their statement that the stars vanished in a straight line that progressed in the general direction of the Earth.

No wide attention was paid to these unusual observations, and even the three watchers did not have much more than idle curiosity. For that reason, because every one was unprepared, the terror at Norton stalked out of night like a hideous dream, as overwhelming as madness itself. Perhaps the rest of the story should be told through the eyes of Lars Loberg, a stolid Norwegian farmer living some three miles from Norton, for it was around his farm that the terror centered, and he himself was a first-hand witness until he went insane and committed suicide.

He arose early as usual on the morning of March 30. It was cold in the farmhouse and he stepped outside to chop an armful of kindling wood. It was already light and snow was falling when he opened the door. He started to go through, then stopped just beyond the threshold and looked around with a blank, puzzled expression on his face. He carefully retraced his steps to the room he had just left, and stood there, looking across the farmyard and open fields.

"Helga!" he called in a curious tone to his wife. "Come here!"

His wife came, and the two stood in the doorway looking at a sight such as they had never before seen. The whole air seemed to be oozing blood. Not a breath of wind was stirring, not a cloud hung in the sky, but a fine mist was falling, a substance that was neither snow nor dust nor blood but that had something of the nature of all three. The snowdrifts around the farmhouse that were not yet fully melted in the spring thaws were already covered with a mantle of brownish-red, and minute by minute, as the strange stuff kept falling from the sky, the layer on the ground grew thicker. The two of them stood there in the quiet of dawn with awe and a little fear, looking at the unusual downfall and a world that was bloody-red. There was a queer odor in the air, almost a stench. It reminded Lars of a two-days-dead cat he once stumbled on, and of a pig he had bled to death recently.

Lars stretched his arm out and caught some of the falling stuff in his hand. "See!" he said simply to Helga. The stuff melted. It did not run off like water. It stayed in little oily globules of a color like old blood. Instead of having the fresh, earthy smell of snow or rain, it gave off an unpleasant odor that offensively suggested something dead.

Helga was superstitious. She shivered and drew back from Lars's outstretched palm. "Red snow!" she said uneasily. "It—it ain't natural—I don't like it. Oh Lars, shut the door!"

Lars looked out somberly for a minute. "Yeah—red snow. Maybe it means a bad year for the crops." Then he shrugged his shoulders and half smiled at Helga. "But it's probably only dust in the air that got mixed up with the snow. Nothing to get scared about, and——"

"Listen!" broke in Helga sharply.

Lars left unfinished what he had started to say. Up to the house from the pig-sty drifted an uproar of grunting and mad squealing such as he had

never heard. In the barn, the horses were neighing and whinnying shrilly, and he heard the wild clatter of trampling hooves. Above the racket of the frightened animals he heard the mournful, whimpering howl of Jerry, the Scotch collie.

Lars tore out of the house on a run. "You stay here!" he shouted back as Helga started to follow him. "I'll see what's after 'em and quiet 'em down!"

The red snow was still falling. Lars raced to the barn first, but there were no tracks of any intruder around it in the new-fallen snow, nor could he find any evidence that man or beast had been prowling around the pig-pen. Lars ran back to the barn, slid open the doors, and did his best to quiet the plunging horses. Something had badly scared them, but he had little time to speculate on what it was. For the first time in his life, the animals paid hardly any attention to his efforts to calm them, and Lars became more puzzled and bewildered every moment. Then he heard Jerry howling nearer, the patter of racing feet came across the yard, and the dog leaped through the open door, shaking itself and tumbling around at his feet.

"There, Jerry, there, Jerry," Lars crooned, bending over to pat the dog. His hand came away wet with the snow, and then it struck him that the animals were afraid of the weird downfall.

There was nothing much he could do till the snow stopped, so he walked around among them talking to them and patting them until they became a little more quiet. About seven o'clock, the snow ceased falling. The horses were still nervous, but gradually ended their crazy bucking and whinnying. Lars decided it was safe to leave them now, and walked back to the farmhouse, mopping his brow.

2. The Thing in the Field

Over bacon and eggs and steaming coffee, Lars and Helga discussed the phenomenon, but with these homely breakfast items before them and a warm feeling inside, the strange snow became less mysterious and alarming to them.

"No wonder the pigs and hosses was scared!" said Lars, half in jest. "I guess anybody'd feel funny to see red snow instead of white. But it ain't anything to worry about. It's probably just dust in the air like I said."

"Maybe so," Helga answered doubtfully. "But where's there any red dust around here?"

The question stumped Lars. He knew Minnesota, the Dakotas, Montana, and Nebraska, but in none of these states was there anything with the peculiar color of the snow.

"I wish you'd stay around here today," Helga kept on slowly. "I don't feel right somehow. Things ain't natural like they ought to be."

"No need to worry," Lars answered briefly. "Everything's all right."

As if in mockery of his words, the whole house shook, the coffee slopped across the table, and a terrific crash burst on their ears from near by.

Without a word Lars made another run for the door. Helga, with super-

stitious fear clutching heavy at her heart, stayed behind to straighten out the table. Some intuition warned her that something was wrong with the world. The red snow, and now this explosive crash—what could they mean? She heard Lars and Jerry walking around the farmhouse as they searched for the cause of the disturbance, but when Lars re-entered the house ten minutes later, the frown on his face showed the futility of his search.

"What was it?" Helga asked.

"Nothing that I could find," he replied, puzzled and irritated. "Sounded like a tree or something fell on the barn, but there wasn't anything the matter. I guess maybe we're hearing things that ain't."

It was poor comfort. The two finished their breakfast in silence. At the conclusion of the meal, Lars said briefly, "I'm going up to the forty-acres to see how the ground's coming along. If you want me, shout and I'll hear you." Helga made no answer in spite of her fears—she knew the futility of arguing with Lars.

Her husband called Jerry and the two set off. The sun was up and the sky fairly clear. It was rapidly getting warmer. The red snow already looked soggy and the air had a bad smell, malodorous and stale.

A path led from the rear of the farmhouse down past the chicken coops and barn, cut across the hog-run, then ran across an open field and finally up a small hill, on the other side of which lay the forty-acres, a tract used for wheat. Lars walked down the path past the barn and across the hog-run. As they started across the open field, Jerry suddenly bristled. Lars heard him growl savagely. He looked around, but nothing unusual was in sight.

"C'mon, Jerry," he called and walked on. The dog lagged behind him, growling and whining. Then Lars stopped abruptly in surprise. Some ten yards ahead of him was a great gash in the wet earth. It must have been freshly made, for the earth bulged around its edges, and there was as yet no pool of water in it.

As Lars continued striding toward it after his momentary pause, Jerry set up a furious barking that ended in a long, whining howl, and refused to advance. "Stop that fool barking and come along." Lars swore irritably. His nerves were becoming frayed. But the collie absolutely would not come, and Lars went on, thinking that the dog would follow him if he took the lead.

He was a few feet from the edge of the gash when something he had not seen caught his ankle and he tripped forward. In one mad second of horror, the pit of hell seemed to open up before him. Something else he could not see hit him a great blow on his forehead, and his outstretched arms were bruised on a hard substance. *He was leaning forward at a forty-five degree angle over the deep gash.* He looked straight down, and saw its bottom a dozen feet below him, but he did not fall. He might have been resting on a steel platform, but there was absolutely nothing in sight.

A great bubbling of sweat broke out on him. The blood from the bruise on his forehead dripped down, but hung suspended in midair a few inches from his face. His eyes glazed with terror, Lars slowly pushed himself

upright and stood trembling a moment. He put out his hand again, and his fingers felt the same stuff, hard as steel, colder than ice, with knobs here and there and strange grooves. There was one depression on the solid surface into which he put his fist, and the hand vanished from sight.

At that, sheer fright gripped him and he turned and ran with all his strength while Jerry whined along at his heels. The terrific crash remained a mystery no longer—would to God that it had! Something that never was of this earth had fallen in the midst of an open field, whether by accident or purpose. All the old folk-lore and witch legends of his race surged into his thoughts to increase his panic. But he thought of Helga too as he ran, and decided that he would say nothing which might alarm her more.

He stopped for a minute outside the farmhouse to get his breath. Then he walked in, trying to be his usual self.

"That you, Lars?" Helga called out. A moment later she entered the kitchen. When she saw him, she ran forward. "Why, Lars, your face is bleeding!"

"Yes, I—I tripped and fell."

Helga looked into his eyes that were yet wild and dilated, and the truth of intuition leaped into her heart.

"Lars! That crash—you know what it was! There was something in the field!"

"No," he answered deliberately, "no, there was nothing in the field."

3. The Falling That Was Upward

It was a solemn pair that sat down at midday for lunch. The oppressive weight of mystery and fear hung over the table, and stopped even the small talk that Lars and Helga ordinarily indulged in. By tacit consent, they said nothing further about the incidents of the morning.

Toward two o'clock, the sky began to cloud up, and it grew cooler outside; but the red snow had all melted in the warmth of the late morning, and around the farmhouse hung a putrid smell, stale and nauseating, the odor of a charnel-house or the grave.

Lars puttered around the kitchen and basement, doing odd jobs to pass time. He did not leave the house. His nerves were on the ragged edge, and he did not know what might happen next. The red snow and the thing in the field lay heavy on his heart. Nature had gone all wrong this day, the security and trust of a lifetime had vanished in a brief hour. What could he do in the presence of a mystery that seemed to have no explanation, and things that went against the laws of life he had relied on? As the great masses of leaden clouds piled up overhead, and gusts of chill wind whined around the yard and the house, the indefinable fear of the unknown hung over his thoughts. He had only one ray of hope: that the paper which the rural postman would leave in the afternoon would give some explanation of the mysterious snowfall. The thing in the field he vainly tried to put out of mind by pretending that it must be a new kind of comet.

It was about four o'clock when Lars, who was upstairs fixing a broken window-sash, heard the postman's whistle. He put down his hammer and nails, then walked down a short passage to the head of the stairs. From there, looking across the front bedroom and out its window, he could see the mail-box on its post where the county road ran by some ninety or a hundred yards in front of the house. There the familiar horse and buggy of the postman were halted. To his surprise, Helga with the mail in her hand was standing there too, talking with him but evidently on the point of returning to the house. She must have seen him coming down the road and gone out to meet him.

The sight of Helga made him curiously uneasy. He wished she had waited to let him go after the mail. As he started to descend the flight of steps, he decided he would ask her to stay inside for the next day or so. But all thoughts were driven from his head and black terror overwhelmed him in a sickening rush when he was half-way down.

For there came to his ears a sound that was yet many sounds. There was a strange, long zing-g-g, the mad whinny of a horse, and the sudden, piercing shriek of a woman. And then there came again that long, strange zing-g-g, and the noise of a great wind.

Lars cleared the rest of the steps in one leap and stumbled on a twisted ankle around the corner and to the front door and so outside. The blind fear which he had felt as he hung over the pit that morning suspended by a thing which he could not see was as nothing to the surge of horror that swept upon him now.

For there was no one in sight. The mail-box was deserted. The road stretched away to the left, bare of any human traveller for three-quarters of a mile, and to the right, just as empty for a half-mile. And in the field that stretched away on the other side of the road, not a living creature was to be seen. Helga and the postman with his horse and buggy had vanished as though they had never been.

But there was a curious thing: all around was gray from the clouds that obscured the sky, except in a round patch of blue perhaps a hundred yards in diameter through which sunlight was pouring above the mail-box. Lars mechanically looked up. High above was the single rift in the cloud-banks, a rift that the surging clouds were rapidly filling again. Even as he looked, some white things fluttered toward earth—letters and papers. Lars picked up a handful like one dazed or mad and stumbled back into the house. He was hardly conscious of the sudden roar of wind that came up, or the wall of sleet that drove in a wild slant from the clouds. In the same mechanical, irresponsible way, he turned again and went out in the half-darkness with the hopeless hope that his eyes and ears had played him a trick. He walked down the road in either direction, searched across the field, called and shouted till his voice was hoarse, but not a thing did he find, and no one answered his vain cries. Then at last when the sleet turned to a fine drizzle

which ceased shortly, he went back to the farmhouse, still in that numbing daze.

The letters were lying on the floor where he had dropped them, and he automatically picked out of them the paper that he had thought might contain a news item of explanation. But he could not concentrate his thoughts, and they were only disjointed phrases that his eye picked out here and there. "Red snow falls—volcanic dust in upper atmosphere—dust clouds from western prairies—curious unknown organism puzzles scientists—chemist asserts he found traces of a substance like blood——" were the paragraph's explanations and comment that ran in a jumble through his thoughts; and somewhere else on the page, a few other phrases: "Strange display of Northern Lights—beams of red, green, violet, yellow—phenomenon observed over Norton—university astronomer offers no explanation——"

4. Something from Above

By nightfall of that day of madness, it was again partly clear outside. In the east still hung a low bank of clouds, but overhead and to the west, the stars were coming out.

Lars sat by a window looking dully into the night, as he had been sitting for the last three hours. His mind had become calmer while he brooded over mysteries he could not fathom, but there was a light in his eyes that had never been in them before. Only the stolidity of his race had thus far kept him from going mad. In his ears still rang that medley of sounds, and his horrified eyes held before them yet the vacant roadway, and the letters fluttering down. It was incredible, unthinkable; yet all his thoughts wound up with the explanation that was no explanation at all: somehow, the postman and Helga had been whirled up from the surface of earth. He had thought of a tornado, but nothing else had been disturbed and he had seen no telltale whirling in the sky. What was it that could reach down to earth all in a brief second or two and instantly vanish skyward with its prey? The cold sweat broke out on his forehead. Once as a child he had wondered how he would feel if he saw an apple fall from a tree and, instead of dropping to earth, sail toward the heavens. Now he knew that dreadful sensation, the feeling that nature had suddenly gone askew.

He stared again into the sky directly above, where the stars shone bright and cold, vainly hoping that he might draw a solution out of those fathomless depths. Minutes ticked by. The Milky Way blazed out in its mysterious beauty, and the night was quiet with no wind.

When it was that he became conscious of something new, he could not say. But in back of his futile thoughts, a forgotten phrase groped for expression: Northern Lights—phenomenon—red, green, violet——

Then he knew. High above him, so faintly that at first he could not be sure, beams of many-colored light stabbed and shot and pulsed across the stars. And it struck Lars with surprise and something of a new fear growing

upon him that nowhere else was the display to be seen. In the past, he had frequently watched the Aurora Borealis creep down from the north, flaming brighter till streamers and cataracts of weird radiance played across all the northern sky. But he had never before seen it confined to so small a spot in the heavens. These flashing beams of green and violet, red and yellow did not seem as remote as the Northern Lights usually were, and it was strange that they occurred in so small an area, an area which looked no larger than a plate, though he knew it must be immensely larger out there in space. Sometimes only two beams would dance around each other, sometimes all would be gone, then a minute later rays of different colors leaped out against the starry velvet of night. And the strangest part of the display was the clearness and straightness of the beams; there was none of the vagueness and change and slow merging into other patterns and colors that the Aurora had; this resembled more the snapping on and off of giant flashlights.

For several minutes, Lars looked at the queer lights with the dullness of a mind dazed by too many shocks. And even as he watched them, he became aware of something yet newer: he seemed to see one or two black specks in the air between him and the lights, like the dancing specks before the eyes of some one who has been struck on the head; and there came to his ears a rush of wind, and two objects hurtled furiously past him to smash on the ground. A moment later, he thought he heard a thud down by the road and another from somewhere afar, but perhaps they were only echoes that he heard, or his ears may have been playing him tricks. He could not be sure, for he looked at the two in the farmyard and his eyes went wide and glary. Like a run-down automaton he rose and stumbled downstairs out into the chill, quiet night.

There was something oddly familiar in that nearest object, and he went up to it with a far-away buzzing in his ears, and a wild swirl of insane dreams in his mind. He bent over the still form; a scorched odor came to his nostrils, he recognized the poor, broken body of Helga, the hideously white skin, he crooned a word of grief and bent over to stroke the lifeless clay. And then he snatched his hand back again, for it burned like the fire of a furnace, but he knew it was no fire that he touched, nor any heat, but the biting, absolute cold of outer space. As Helga had vanished, in mystery and terror, so had she returned, but the horror for her was over. For him it kept on. The night was all silent, but that maddening buzz was louder in his brain. He shook his head to get rid of it, and his eyes fell upon the other object.

For a second that was as long as eternity, time and space and the world stood still for Lars. No eyes could look unchanged on that slimy blob of liquid flesh and fungus and ichor, with its loathly tentacles, and beaks, its blackness of corruption, its monstrous mixture of all that was obscene in the vegetable and animal kingdoms, and more horrible still, the thing's metallic core like brown quicksilver that still moved feebly with an appalling

parody of life; and in its center a sickly, rotten bulb of a dead, blind eye that glared foully at Lars with its dying light.

The buzzing in his ears swelled to a grating, shrill din, something snapped, his teeth champed together, and the madness was upon him. He muttered crooning endearments to Helga, shrieked blasphemies at the slimy thing from above, burst out into peals of mirthless laughter and rasping sobs. His crazed mind went off on another tangent, and he stopped his muttering and shrieking as suddenly as he had begun; instead, he chuckled with insane cunning as though he had thought of a way to cheat his enemy. He backed slyly to the farmhouse, was gone for a minute, reappeared with a great armful of kindling wood. He returned to fetch another and another till a heap of it lay on the ground. He made a rude pyre out of it except for an armful or two; he dragged the body of Helga onto it though his hands burned as if in a white-hot furnace; he ran back, reappeared with a can, poured kerosene on the pyre. He lighted it with tears of madness and grief running down his face. Then fury entered his heart, and he threw the rest of the kindling on the obscene thing, and drenched it with the kerosene. As the flames flared up, he danced around with grief and hatred and insanity alternately writhing across his features. He ran back to the woodshed for more fuel. He was about to return with a load of cordwood when he heard the roar of a small explosion, saw a fountain of sparks and burning wood spew into the air. He stood agape for a second, then ran madly to the fires. The obscene monstrosity was no more—something in it or something it carried had exploded, and in two or three places burning chunks smoldered on the farmhouse roof. But Lars paid no attention to them or to the flames that were beginning to lick at the eaves, for some half-forgotten thing was pounding at the back of his thoughts.

The thing in the field! The thing in the field! The phrase sang through his head like a chant, and he burst out into another wild peal of maniacal laughter. He scarcely looked at the black smoke that surged up from Helga's funeral pyre, or the flames that consumed, as he turned and sped back to the pile of wood. He picked up all he could carry of the three-foot lengths and stumbled down the path, staggering under the weight. When he reached the gash in earth, faintly illuminated by the red glare that began to come from the burning roof of the farmhouse, he tossed his whole armful onto the invisible thing, and shouted madly again as the wood hung suspended in air over the gap. He returned again and again until all the wood was strewn around and over the thing that could not be seen. On his last trip, he brought two one-gallon cans of kerosene and poured them on as much of the wood as was within reach, then tossed them to the top of the pile and lighted the mass. A tongue of fire leaped out and raced over the pile, and a volume of thick black smoke issued up. The field around him was already made bright by a lurid glare from the farmhouse that was now entirely ablaze. Like a necromancer uttering his ritual of incantation and dark sorcery, Lars leaped and danced and howled around the great bonfire he had built. A tower of black smoke from the kerosene mounted almost

straight up in the air from the flames, the wood crackled, the heat became scorching and blistering. And under the metamorphosis of fire, Lars saw a last, strange riddle shape itself before his eyes. There were outlines forming, the suggestion of a vast structure imbedded deeply in earth. He gibbered to the stars as he saw planes and angles and cubes that looked like spheres and the geometry of another dimension. His maniacal laughter rang out again as he looked through the glowing, transparent walls and saw objects he could not name, strangely mounted mechanical devices, fantastic articles that no mind on earth could have imagined or shaped. And lying around them were dozens of those hellish slimy things that were neither animal nor vegetable nor matter, but partook loathsomely of the nature of all three. He shouted in mirthless glee as he glimpsed briefly still other things— weird, gaseous substances on the floor that held their shape as rigidly as dead bodies.

There came a hiss like a great sigh, a rumble of warning, and Lars insanely flung his arms wide apart as if to embrace the cleansing fire. It was his last gesture, for earth and sky and life trembled and were blasted before the titanic explosion that wiped out the thing in the field.

3. A Riddle of the Stars

On the afternoon of March 30, shortly after two p. m., Larry Greene took off from the Twin City flying-field with a special consignment of bank dispatches for Seattle. His plane was last seen at Elk Forks, twenty miles east of Norton, at approximately four o'clock. When nothing more was seen of him for several hours and no report was received, the importance of his cargo caused a searching-party to be sent out. Early in the morning of March 31, his airplane was found near the burned Loberg farmhouse. It was completely smashed, but the pilot's body was nowhere around. The searching-party continued to scour the area. An hour later, the missing flyer was picked up, wandering in a dazed condition through a field near Norton. His account of what had happened was so singular and fantastic that his sanity was questioned. When, however, he was discovered to be suffering badly from exposure, he was immediately rushed to the Twin Cities for medical attention. All efforts to save his life were unavailing. He died of gangrenous infection several days later. Among his effects were found two significant items: a black object, and the following extraordinary communication, which was apparently written sometime during the first day of his confinement for medical care:

"To others I leave the task of deciding whether I have been the victim of insanity or hallucinations. Already I myself doubt the testimony of my own eyes and ears. If it were not for the disk which I brought with me, I would believe the entire adventure to be a delusion or a dream, but unless the disk proves to be a figment of a deranged imagination, I cannot doubt the truth of what I have to say and the reality of what I saw.

"At two-ten p. m. on March 30 I took off from the Twin City flying-field

with a bundle of bank dispatches for Seattle. I headed due west. Weather conditions were fair for the first hour and I kept at the relatively low flying level of two thousand feet. At this point, somewhat less than one hundred miles from the Twin Cities, I was nearing a region for which sleet or snow storms were forecast. Cloud-banks were piling up ahead, so I immediately began to climb for altitude. The last town I saw was Elk Forks. After that, the clouds below me obscured everything.

"I had climbed to six thousand feet, then seven thousand five hundred, and was now keeping to an altitude of nine thousand feet. I estimated that I must now be nearing Norton.

"Without a word of warning, the terror came.

"My plane was suddenly enveloped in a greenish light. The motor and propeller droned, but my progress was at a complete standstill. My altimeter showed eleven, thirteen, fifteen thousand feet so rapidly that I could hardly follow it. Nothing I could do had any effect on the 'plane or its incredible rise. The sensation was sickening. I had the motor wide open, but not a foot did we advance. Instead, the 'plane rose straight up like a balloon. I scarcely had time even to adjust my oxygen tank and turn on the current for the air-tight electrically heated suit that I always wear in cold weather flying. The altimeter soared to forty thousand feet, then froze.

"Everything had happened so instantly that I was almost stunned. A few seconds at most could have elapsed between the moment the greenish light came and the altimeter froze.

"Through my suit, I began to feel an intense cold. I had no knowledge of how high I now was, but I knew that if my strange ascent were not quickly halted, I would perish in the absolute or almost absolute zero of the upper atmosphere. The motor now froze and went dead. Instead of falling, the airplane remained in its unnatural suspension, still bathed in green light. The sky above me had become so dark that I was certain I must be near the outer edge of earth's atmospheric blanket. The cold was more piercing than ever.

"At this moment, I thought I heard two faint clicks closely following each other. A few seconds later, they were repeated. The green light disappeared. Overhead, the stars went out. The effect was precisely as if I were looking through an invisible pane of glass but could see nothing. And only a few feet away from my 'plane there had suddenly appeared the bodies of a dead man and a woman. The intense cold rapidly lessened in severity, but had it been a thousand times as icy as it was, it could not have been as numbing as the strange horror of all that had happened to me in a brief minute. I was in the midst of a hellish nightmare infinitely more titanic and brain-shattering than any I had ever had. The terror and fear, of nauseating mystery were upon me, I hardly knew whether I was dreaming or awake, alive or already beyond the borderland of death. And those two corpses hanging in the air near me—their appearance was as ghastly as it was inexplicable.

"The whole thing was like a delirious vision. I felt as if I were confined,

the terrific cold had ceased, yet there was not a star in the sky above me nor could I see the earth beneath. If it were not for the airplane and the two bodies, I would have believed that I had gone blind.

"I had hardly understood—or rather, realized my situation since I did not understand it at all—when there came to me again a faint click, from above, and I automatically looked up.

"I do not know what I expected to see, except anything or nothing. But it was no answer to any of the thousand questions in my mind that I saw, but mystery darker and deeper. There was cloud vapor a dozen feet above me—or was there? I have never before seen a gaseous substance hold its form and shape rigidly, but I did then, and with a sick, faint feeling, I realized that the cloud-like thing was alive. I had an impression of eyes burning into mine, but there were no eyes visible in it. My brain received a command, but my ears heard no sound. In some way that I could not comprehend, the monstrous living substance above me had put into my thoughts a picture of myself climbing from the cockpit, and ascending.

"Climb from the cockpit of an airplane heaven knows how many miles above earth? It was madness, suicide. I fought with all my strength to retain my seat. But I was powerless, and slowly I climbed over the side into empty space.

I should have fallen, down, down like a dead weight. But I was standing as upright as if solid ground were beneath my feet. Where was the ultimate cold that should be freezing me? Why did I not fall? What was the meaning of all the eerie events of the past few minutes? I was trembling violently, hot and cold sweat broke out on me, a deadly fear gnawed at my heart for the first time in my life.

"Then I thought I must have entered some queer, hypnotic state, for a sudden feeling of peace came over me, and in answer to another silent command I mounted what seemed to be a short ladder, and stepped off a moment later to another invisible floor. The gaseous thing retreated as I advanced, and now hung a few yards away from me. But I scarcely noticed it, for my eyes were bewildered by the sight around me, and a dim light of comprehension began to clear away the fog over my thoughts.

"Masses of intricate, gleaming machinery and delicate mechanism were everywhere about me, together with elaborate dials, controls, and other devices whose purpose I could not even conjecture. Around each device and control were grouped scores of the gaseous things. I dreamed for a moment that I was in an airship of some new kind, but there were no enclosing walls and I could see no floor beneath me. Yet the sky was devoid of stars.

"All this I noticed in a brief instant before my captor mutely commanded me to walk forward a few paces and seat myself. Too stunned and overwhelmed to offer any resistance, I did so. The thing drifted toward me and hung a few feet away. I looked at it, and again I had an impression of burning eyes that I could not see. But there came over me again that odd sensation of peace.

"How can I describe the strange terror and fascination of the scene, or what followed? Surely no man was ever before so suddenly jerked from the habits and thoughts of a lifetime as I was then. Without my realizing it until afterward, I must have been placed again under hypnotic or mental control, for the mechanism and gaseous shapes surrounding me suddenly faded away into blankness, and then, while I had the disembodied feeling of one who dreams, a succession of fantastic images and pictures were imposed on my imagination by the thing before me. No word passed between us, for neither could have understood the language of the other. By a kind of mesmeric thought-transference, I was made to understand all that had happened to me, and some things I had not known about, and some of which I shall probably never have any further knowledge to certify their truth.

"As I had begun to suspect, I was now in a space-flyer of utterly new type and construction to me. The being who hung a few yards away was Relelpa, director of an expedition from Saturn on a mission that meant existence or death to the solar system.

"For thousands of years, civilization had been progressing there until the inhabitants were now as far ahead of us as we are ahead of jungle apes. The life force which is persistent everywhere in an infinite variety of organisms produced on Saturn opaque, gaseous substances like Relelpa. Many years before our meeting, these eery inhabitants of Saturn had discovered deep in the bowels of their planet one of the rarest elements in all the universe. Saturn itself contained only a few thousand tons of the ore from which this element, Seggglyn, was extracted.

"Seggglyn resists cold even to absolute zero, but if exposed to sufficient heat it explodes. Its most curious and most valuable property is its imperviousness to gravitation. For instance, a lump of the pure element isolated under an open sky is immediately hurled skyward by the centrifugal force of the spinning planet, since gravitation has no effect on it. Until it finally breaks up into atomic particles, it hurtles forever through the universe, rebounding anew from any gravitational pull which it may chance to come near.

"In extracting the element and in experimenting with it, the Saturnians not only discovered how to control it but obtained by-products of inestimable value. Seggglyn is completely transparent, but nothing beyond it is visible—as if you looked through a pane of glass but could see nothing beyond. Perhaps I can make this clearer by saying that it is like a blind spot. If you put two black dots on a cardboard, hold the cardboard at arm's length, focus your eyes on one dot, and then draw the cardboard toward you, one of the dots will disappear when the cardboard is about a foot and a half from your eyes. Well, Seggglyn acts like a blind spot at any distance from the eye of the beholder.

"In extracting the element, the Saturnians found that the last impurity removed had the effect of counteracting the element; that is, until the impurity was taken out, Seggglyn was held by gravitational attraction.

Thus, by putting the impurity back in, or coating Seggglyn with it, the element had only normal mineral properties.

"There was only a limited amount of the stuff on Saturn, and no trace of it was ever found in the spectrum of any star. What should be done with it? The Saturnians considered every possible use, and finally decided that it would be most valuable as an offense and defense against any danger; and so they built this vast space-flyer, and armed it with all their weapons and rays of destruction. The flyer could not be seen, nor its location guessed unless it crossed a star and shut out the light.

"On the outside of the flyer at one tip were placed dozens of thin plates of the impurity. These were controlled by radio from inside the ship. They could be adjusted to any position on the outside, so that the ship's speed could be regulated, and just enough gravitational pull shut off or turned on to let the ship rise and land safely.

"With their space-flyer, the Saturnians had explored the solar system hundreds of years ago, and had even ventured out into the galaxy beyond, for there was apparently no limit to the speed which it could attain. If its rate of speed were constant when it left the gravitational influence of Saturn, it would keep on going at that rate. But if its speed were controlled so that it was constantly increasing at the point where it passed beyond Saturn's influence, its acceleration would continue at the same rate, and if it were worth the risk, a speed of hundreds of thousands of light-years per second could be reached.

"After their early explorations and experiments, the Saturnians kept the flyer idle, but always in readiness for any danger. They had discovered many disquieting matters on their trips, but so long as nothing happened, they preserved their policy of waiting in readiness.

"And out of night with no warning had suddenly come the one cataclysmic danger that they had not anticipated. From their great central observatory, the Saturnians kept up a constant survey of the heavens for astronomic and protective reasons. One week the observation had shown a normal view of the region of the evening star. And the next week, stars were disappearing momentarily in a straight line that travelled toward the solar system.

"They could not believe the explanation, but there was only one explanation possible. Some star or world beyond the reach of their farthest telescope had possessed the rare ore, and a space-ship made from Seggglyn, whether a scouting party or an expedition of invaders, was hourly leaping colossal stellar distances toward the solar system. Their surprise turned almost into panic when they discovered that instead of one, there were three space-flyers hurtling onward!

"So short was the warning that desperate measures had to be taken. Hasty calculations showed that the invaders were heading toward Earth first, perhaps to reconnoiter or to use Earth as a ricochet for reaching Saturn. Relelpa was summoned to lead the party. The need of reaching Earth before or not later than the invaders was desperate. It could not be accomplished even with the normal acceleration of the Saturnian space-flyer. In the crisis, at

the moment when the nullifying plates were stripped from the outside of the flyer, Saturn's most powerful explosive was used to hurl it off in a blinding flash to give it the initial acceleration required.

"Over Earth, they met; and before the invaders realized that their coming was known, the red annihilation ray of the Saturn flyer stabbed out and the first ship from outside dissolved into brownish dust that drifted down. The red ray stabbed out again but missed; the second ship which used some other means than black plates of using gravitational pull as the first and third also did had dropped suddenly to escape the deadly ray; but the ship behind it had also dived and crashed into the tip of its own comrade, and as the bitter cold of space mowed down its occupants, the second ship hurtled to Earth. Some of its occupants spilled out into space, and from one of these who was instantly caught and swept to the Saturn-flyer by the green magnetic ray, the story of the invaders was found out.

"Where they came from is unknown, for their world lies beyond any galaxy or nebula known to astronomers of the solar system. They too had discovered Seggglyn on their world, and had discovered it at the last moment, for their world was dying and had almost reached its end. With their super-telescopes, they had found traces of Seggglyn in the spectrum of Saturn long before it was isolated on their own world. Time was priceless to these gruesome plant-animal-mineral creatures from the spaces beyond. They had built three ships, but these were not enough to transport all the inhabitants of their world before the end came. If they could obtain the ore from Saturn and build two more ships or even one great flyer, they would be saved.

"And so the three flyers started out, each loaded with a thousand of the loathly creatures. One ship was to land on the most habitable of the planets, Earth, and wipe out all life on it with the violet ray of terrific heat and the yellow ray that blasted anything it touched. The other two were to disgorge on Saturn, and while one band destroyed the inhabitants, the other would extract Seggglyn from the ore and build as many ships as possible. As soon as the three flyers had landed, they were to return to their world, empty except for the crews to man them, in order to bring back other thousands of the loathsome, obscene things.

"And their hellish plan would have succeeded if they had not neglected one possibility: they thought that the Saturnians were unaware of the property of Seggglyn, and that the ore was still unmined; or that in any case, their own three space-flyers would prove to be invincible. And so, all unprepared, in the very moment of their triumph the strength of the invaders was cut down by two-thirds.

"But now the third ship was warned; and all this day the Saturn-flyer had been engaged with it in a struggle on which the fate of worlds depended. If the Saturnians were defeated, Earth and Saturn were doomed, even though the invaders were unable to save all the inhabitants of their own world by transporting them across space.

"Relclpa showed me a great, metallic disk, on which the heavens were

mirrored; since those inside the flyer could see nothing outside, television was necessarily employed for guidance. And there, close to the center of the disk which marked our position, I saw stars blotted out where the invaders hung.

"What can I do? Why do you want me? were the two silent questions that I asked Relelpa; and the answer came back, there was nothing I could do up here. Relelpa had sighted my airplane and ordered it picked up by the green ray. He had told me all he wanted to, and I was now about to be released to warn the people of my world in the event that the Saturnians were defeated.

"I had no will-power of my own beside this mental giant, I merely followed his directions. It would have been fatal to try using my airplane at this height, and my parachute would probably have ripped from my shoulders with the force and speed of my fall when it finally opened. Relelpa gave me a curious black disk when he read my thoughts, and again by mental image showed me how to use it.

"Suddenly he flashed me the image that the final, desperate battle was near. At the same instant, he thrust me toward the outer chamber through which I had originally entered. I saw his strange, cloud-like form for the last time, I felt him wish me good luck as I in turn wished him success, and then the door clicked behind me. I held the disk over my head, manipulating it as he had explained, so that parts of the black covering slid off the Seggglyn. I heard another click, and then all at once I dropped, and my airplane twisted past me hurtling downward and after it the bodies of the two people who had been on earth in the path of the green ray when its magnetic power picked me up sped by me, and behind them the hideous monster which the Saturnians had captured.

"As I fell slowly, still feeling as if I had dreamed a horrible nightmare, I looked above me; and my eyes went wide when I saw red and green ray flashing against yellow and violet beam. Surely it was the strangest and most important battle ever witnessed by man! Sometimes all four rays darted and flamed out, sometimes only one or two; or both rays of one flyer would vanish only to reappear suddenly in another spot.

"I heard the wind whistle past me, I looked at earth far below, and a great fear took hold of me; but I was falling no faster than I would be with a parachute, and the mental picture of Relelpa came back to reassure me.

"Once more I looked upward. I saw only the red and green rays leaping madly across the sky in a pæan of victory—the battle was won! . . .

"The doctor tells me that gangrene has set in. I guess I was more seriously frozen than I thought in those upper spaces. They think I am crazy and they won't believe what I tried to tell them last night. Maybe I am crazy, but I swear that I saw all the things I have written of as plainly as I see now my hospital cot or the skylight above me or the black disk under my pillow. Well, that ought to convince them if nothing else does.

"LARRY GREENE."

6. *The Black Disk*

Underneath the pillow of the cot on which Larry Greene had died, a small disk was found. The nurse who discovered it looked at it in some curiosity, puzzled as to its purpose and wondering what to do with it. Finally she called the doctor who had vainly tried to save the pilot's life.

"What is it?" he brusquely inquired.

"That's just it, I don't know," she answered. "I found this on Mr. Greene's cot. What shall I do with it?"

The doctor took the object and scrutinized it closely. It was a black disk, slightly oval in shape, and approximately a foot in diameter. It was perfectly flat, with an unvarying thickness of a half-inch. On two sides it was indented, and at each indentation was a row of tiny knobs.

"H'mm," mused the doctor, "I've never seen anything quite like it." He fingered the knobs meditatively.

There was a faint click, and the black covering of the disk somehow seemed to slide off or collapse. And all at once, he found himself with nothing in his hands. He heard a sudden wind, the crash of shattered glass, a sound like the rush of air.

The dumfounded doctor looked at an amazed nurse, as bits of glass from the broken skylight dropped around them. The black disk which they had been examining a few seconds ago had vanished.

The Wax Doll

by Greye La Spina

Greye La Spina is one of the original group of Weird Tales writers whose stories helped a good deal to establish that oldest existing fantasy magazine in its formative days of 1923 and 1924. But prior to Weird Tales there was an earlier effort to establish an all-fantasy pulp; one which proved sadly short-lived. This was a magazine called The Thrill Book, published in 1919, which lasted a scant dozen or so semi-monthly numbers. Copies of it are probably the scarcest items in any fantasy collection. "The Wax Doll" appeared in that pioneer magazine, for Miss La Spina was one of its main contributors. It is an eerie tale of a little girl whose sole plaything was a forbidden doll.

A

NICE BUTTERWORTH, beloved and only child of Worthy and Zebedee Butterworth. Aged nine years and three weeks. Requiescat in pace."

That is the inscription. As for the first part, it is plain enough; he who runs may read. But for the Latin inscription, there are those in Ellersville who assert that it has not always been true.

While there is nothing *outré* about the tiny marker with its sculptured words, nothing out of the ordinary about the softly sloping mound, covered with living green by the English ivy that has grown closely over it, yet there is something strange about that grave that draws a stranger's attention as would a lodestone and holds it until the story of little Anice Butterworth and the wax doll has transformed idle curiosity into deep wonder and aching pity.

About her grave lie children's toys, some of them quite new and shiny. And chief among them all is a great, weather-beaten wax doll that sits against the headstone gazing vacantly across the burial ground from her post of vantage. Any Ellersville child will tell you they are there for Anice to play with.

Poor little Anice! She has her share of toys now. God only knows with what agony of longing and remorse her bereaved parents put them there for

her eyes to gloat upon, for her unseen fingers to caress. If it be true that our every action brings with it the appropriate reward or castigation, then how terribly have Worthy and Zebedee Butterworth been punished for their blind, willful ignorance of the heart of a little child!

They had their own ideas about bringing up children, did Worthy and Zebedee. Her people had been the kind that never smiled on the Sabbath day for fear God might be offended at their sinful levity. Zebedee's had been the kind that wept over every penny spent and—figuratively speaking—killed the fatted calf over each dollar that came in. The combination of temperaments proved an unfortunate one for the innocent victim of their solicitous love.

From the time she was old enough to take notice, Anice Butterworth had been an object of deep commiseration to Ellersville. She was never seen playing as other children play. She was never permitted a toy. Toys cost good money, her father said. Her mother's reason was deeper laid; if we miserable sinners expect to attain heaven eventually, we must offer unto God the sacrifice of a broken and contrite spirit, she asserted. This was interpreted as a sacrifice of every joy-inspiring emotion of the human heart. Between the two of them, they gave their only child a fine babyhood and little-girlhood!

They loved her, her father and mother. They loved her with an affection that almost terrified them by its strength. But the more they realized its depth, the more they felt assured that it was an idolatrous passion that must be strangled at its birth. The Eastern mother's superstitious terror that her babe's beauty will bring upon it the curse of the Evil Eye was as nothing to the fear of these Christian parents that God would punish their presumption in loving so deeply and tenderly what was, after all, only a thing of the flesh. So they crucified Anice to save her from the wrath of God; crucified her on the cross of their own terrors, and gloated over her misery in a vain belief that they were propitiating the Almighty in her behalf.

Ellersville looked on indignantly but impotently to see the loving little creature crushed slowly and systematically under the Juggernaut created by her parents. She was deprived conscientiously of everything that promised to give her pleasure. Her father repeatedly told her that playthings cost too much, which was his own way of refusing her what he felt was harmful to her spiritual welfare. Her mother taught her that God loves those who *fear* Him, and carefully guided those tiny faltering feet into paths of darkness and terror that the Heavenly Father surely never meant for her tender youth to travel. Anice became an old little thing at six years of age, age measured by standards of time, at nine, she was older than the oldest inhabitant of Ellersville, if one judged her age by the gleam of her crushed soul out of inexpressibly pathetic eyes.

It was only natural that people should try to soften the harsh rules the Butterworths had laid down for the little girl, by giving her playthings from time to time. Not that it did much good. Either the toys were returned with frigid courtesy or they disappeared entirely from the face of the earth so far as Anice was concerned. Worthy Butterworth filled every moment

of Anice's time with doleful readings from some fearfully pious book of ancient sermons or with plain sewing, that bane of the life of little girls. Very early Anice had learned to give up attempts to play make-believe by herself; her mother soon learned of this wayward tendency and enforced her ideas upon the child by keeping the poor little creature constantly at her side, busied with her morbid reading or with endless patchwork.

On Anice's ninth birthday, nevertheless, Ellersville people plucked up sufficient courage to dare cross the path of the juggernaut. They got together and bought a special gift for Anice, a wonderfully beautiful great wax doll, dressed marvellously in silk and laces; a doll to have warmed the heart of even the most pampered little girl. The ladies' sewing circle of the Methodist church collected the money for this present with great privacy and then went in a body to the Butterworth home on Anice's birthday, to present her boldly with the doll.

Worthy could hardly have refused the gift. Her husband had recently given the church a donation, generous for him, toward new pews, and she felt that the doll was by way of being appreciative recognition on the part of the sewing circle. Zebedee could not have refused it if he would; there was something in the attitude of the ladies who presented it that prevented his saying a word of protest. Moreover, it had cost a pretty penny and he knew it. He figured it could be put away against the day when Anice would no longer be tempted by such worldly toys. Yet both the Butterworths were inwardly certain that the possession of this doll would be the complete ruination of their little precious daughter.

During the hours that the members of the sewing circle remained in the house, Anice Butterworth sat in their midst, the marvellous doll in her arms, enjoying such an ecstasy of exaltation as the poor little creature had never experienced in her entire short life. On a low hassock she sat, her feet straight before her on the floor; her little petticoats, painfully sewed, washed and ironed by her own busy child hands, stiffly refusing to be smoothed down decorously enough to give the wonderful doll a comfortable seat. Not that she noticed this objectively; she was too completely wrapped up in the exquisite joy of holding in her own arms, against her thumping little heart, such a plaything as she had never, in her wildest imaginings, dreamed might be hers. To hold it unrebuked—what bliss! What unutterable felicity!

She clung to it, hardly daring a close examination, lest she draw upon herself the disapprobation of her troubled parents. Occasionally she stole a downward glance into the smiling waxen face with an expression of such tender adoration on her own that some of the ladies declared afterward that it was enough to bring tears to one's eyes. One hand stroked the silken skirts caressingly with slow motions of luxurious enjoyment; the other gripped the doll feverishly. For an hour, one excruciatingly beautiful hour, Anice lived such emotions as other children spread over years of childhood experience.

The ladies rose to go. One of them asked her: "What will you name your doll, Anice?"

Without hesitation, but as if she had already cogitated long and seriously upon this difficult subject and had arrived at a firm decision, Anice had replied with a world of affection in her tones:

"Beloved!"

And amid the cautiously exchanged glances, she buried her face deeply, with a sigh of utter contentment, in the silken attire of her treasure.

Anice's ninth birthday became an event of much speculation in Ellersville, as might be surmised. It was for a time believed that the Ladies' Sewing Circle had managed by their gift to alter the attitude of the Butterworths toward the poor little one. Everywhere the wish was expressed that Anice might from then on enjoy some of the innocent pleasures and happinesses of life that other children had so freely as their just portion. But the villagers were yet to learn that they had reckoned without their Butterworths.

Out of deference to the opinions of the ladies who had just left the house, Worthy did not immediately exile the wax doll; she took it firmly from Anice's arms and set it high out of reach upon a mantel. This simple act was not accomplished with ease. For once in her life the little girl resented from the very depths of her being the wrong that she instinctively felt was put upon her. She clung to the beautiful plaything with fierce strength; she actually kicked at her mother with stoutly clad little feet. She screamed and gritted her teeth in mad determination not to be parted from her first and only love. Worthy actually found it necessary to pry the clinging fingers from the silken garments of that disturber of family peace by main force.

The worse Anice behaved, the more strongly was Worthy convinced that in keeping playthings from the child she had acted wisely. If a single hour's association with a mere wax doll could affect Anice so terribly after nine years of careful training, how would she have been behaving, Worthy wondered, had she always been permitted toys? Zebedee agreed fully with his wife in her action and in her conclusions. He went a little further; he took the doll from the mantel, his face dark with a disapproving scowl, and hid it in the garret.

Anice's sad fall from grace was meted out severe punishment, in allotting which Worthy showed her ingenuity. The child had to read aloud, page after page of Fox's *Martyrs* for days, while her mother passed in and out of the room to which the child had been banished for a week. She was also condemned to rip out and make over an entire patchwork quilt which she had recently finished with innocent pride and satisfaction, as well as infinite labor.

The childish mind rebelled, God knows how bitterly, but in silence. She sat quietly in her high-backed chair and read in toneless monotony the horrors of the early martyrs' sufferings, or bent dull eyes upon the bits of colored cloth which she had ripped apart and must sew together again at her mother's behest.

When the week's punishment was over, her parents missed her one night from her bed, after hearing soft footsteps stealing down the hall. Zebedee intuitively went at once to the garret, the lines of his mouth tightening ominously. He found her there, the small face raised up to his, smiling and

contented; the little arms clasped warmly about the bone of contention which lay against her yearning heart. He stood looking down at her with strange expressions chasing each other across his stern countenance. He returned to bed with the simple observation that she must have walked in her sleep to the garret and that he had tucked a blanket about her and left her there; it would be time enough in the morning, he said, to settle with her. Worthy knew only too well what had taken the child to the garret, but she gave no outward sign of her knowledge; she acquiesced with her husband's decision.

In the morning Anice was parted again from the doll, although she showed herself yet more obstreperous and determined, refusing to be separated from her beloved. The tears, the cries, the pleading, all fell upon unseeing eyes and deaf ears. Such was the love of those two for her future salvation that they damned her earthly happiness completely. By degrees the child became calmer but her expression was one that almost terrified her parents by its unearthly resolution.

"I shall always find my Beloved," she declared, rebellious eyes and compressed lips defying them. "You cannot keep her away from me. We cannot be separated, because she loves me as I love her."

That was in late autumn. Winter came on as it sometimes does, in a sudden, unexpected storm of biting cold, bitter winds, and driving snow. From November soddenness of skies emerged the bleak December weather.

During the days that followed Anice made no further outward signs of the rebellion she had so passionately declared. She sewed her wrinkled little patches together again; she read the horrors of the early martyrs with dull indifference. No word, no sign, escaped her that was connected with the wax doll. Her parents congratulated themselves that she had at last entirely forgotten it. It was not so, however, and they were soon to learn how tragically deep had grown Anice's love for her Beloved.

Zebedee had put the doll in the woodshed, locking it in without further precautions of concealment from the child, whose great dark eyes followed his every movement the day he carried her Beloved away. He remarked to Worthy, almost contemptuously, that he guessed he'd settled that matter for good and all. He was to recall his words afterward with an agony of remorse.

Ellersville can never forget the blizzard that raged for three days that winter, covering the entire countryside with deep drifts. The third night of the storm Worthy Butterworth roused from her sleep and grasped at her husband's shoulder, shaking him to alertness. She thought she had heard a strange noise. Zebedee sat up and listened intently.

It was Anice sobbing in her sleep. She was calling in heart-rending tones: "Beloved! Beloved!"

The mother's heart ached within her but her thoughts of an angry and jealous God restrained and hardened her.

She did go so far as to whisper to her husband, "Do you suppose we can have been wrong about that doll?"

He shook his head emphatically. But even as he denied the possibility of

an error in their combined judgment, he felt that weakening toward the sobbing, dreaming child which proves to us what playthings we ourselves are in the force of our emotions.

They composed themselves to sleep again but their dreams were troubled. So troubled that, although she could not remember what hers had been about, Worthy rose with the first dim light of a white day that broke in through the swirling snow that beat and tore with pale, malevolent fingers at the windows, and went into Anice's room to assure herself that the child was sleeping quietly. Her wild screams brought Zebedee to her side in a flash.

"My baby! Where is my baby?" she shrieked, sudden terror clutching at her heart. "Something is wrong! Something has happened to Anice! Where can she be?"

For the bed was empty of its small occupant.

Her husband strove to quiet her.

"She is probably hiding in the garret again," he assured her, but he knew his words were foolish. The wax doll was not in the garret.

He began to tremble with the vehemence of the emotion that shook Worthy, whose trembling body he was supporting. She looked from the window with dazed, vacant eyes, as though she would pierce by sheer strength of will those blinding flurries of snow.

"God forgive us!" she screamed out suddenly. "She is there!"

She fell, a limp weight, against her husband's breast.

He laid her on Anice's bed. He did not dare take time to bring her back to merciless consciousness, for now something pulled at him with invisible fingers that would not be denied. He let himself be led.

Out of the kitchen door into the shrieking, howling storm he went, the bitter cold penetrating his very heart, chilling it so that it beat slowly and sluggishly as though some power from without were striving to stop its beating. Down the pathway he plunged blindly, fighting for every step against the surging of that mighty wind, terrified apprehensions growing upon him with every forward step. His leaden feet dragged him back when he tried to pull them through the deep drifts that in three days and nights had changed the entire aspect of the countryside. On he went, to the woodshed where, but a short two weeks ago he had hidden the wax doll away from the longing child heart that had loved it so tenderly, from the gentle hands that would have caressed it so lovingly.

It was there he found his child, as he knew he would. White as the snow that clung in frozen clods to her thin little nightdress; pale as the pallor of that dead morning, she half reclined, half knelt as if in supplication, against the door that kept her away from her Beloved. Upon the childish face was a frozen appeal; in the wide-open staring eyes an entreaty. They were the more pathetic and heartrending because Zebedee knew their meaning well, and knew that it had gone unanswered.

The father gathered up that poor little body and held it tightly to him as though to cool the fires of burning grief that consumed him. He fought his way grimly back to the house.

Worthy stood at the door to receive him. Mercifully had the knowledge come to her of the tragic death of her child. It did not stagger her now as with a sudden blow; she knew well what had befallen. She stood there, dumbly holding out her arms for that precious little body.

It was natural and inevitable that they should have tried everything their brains could devise, in mad and hopeless attempts to call back the spirit of their only child to its deserted habitation. All was vain. They knew it even while they worked over the cold, lifeless body. But their unutterable grief, hoping against the evidence of their senses, drove them on until they reached the moment when they had to admit to each other with despairing glances that their efforts were futile. Anice had slipped quietly away from them in the terror of that surging storm of howling wind and driving snow, never to return.

Their grief was terrible, but they repressed it as they had always forced themselves to repress the tenderer emotions of their hearts. The Lord had given. The Lord had taken away. Blessed be the name of the Lord. Of their own instrumentality in this taking away, did they ever think at all? Who knows?

Dumbly, numbly, they went about their daily tasks. Then Zebedee hitched up and went for the undertaker through the wild gusts of wind that whipped him as he drove, while the mother sat dry-eyed by the body of her only child.

The storm had died down when the day of Anice's funeral came, so that the morning dawned shining upon a spotlessly beautiful world, in harmony with the pure soul that had taken flight. They made her grave where you can see it now, and a few days afterwards the headstone, so pitiful in its pathetic brevity and the condensed tragedy of its inscription, marked her resting place. They left her then, to repose in peace. But did she? Opinion even in Ellersville is divided on that point.

Zebedee did not go near the woodshed until actually forced by the necessity for firewood. Then he unlocked the door. He dared not face the silent reproach in the fixed smile of the wax doll, reminding him of the loved child who had gone from him forever. When he came out with an armful of wood, a strange expression was etched on his face, an expression of mingled incredulity and horror and dismay. He said nothing to Worthy at the time.

"I'm imagining things," he muttered to himself.

But the next time wood was needed, he managed to be beyond his wife's call, so that she had to go for it herself. When she returned, he said to her with an air of repressed excitement:

"Where—where was the doll?"

"On the shelf," she replied, wonderingly, looking at him with query in her sad eyes.

"Were there—were there boxes—piled under the shelf—as if—someone small had tried to climb up—to the doll?" he faltered shamefacedly, his eyes avoiding hers.

She stopped short on her way to the wood-box near the stove to regard him with searching face.

"Just what do you mean?" she demanded nervously.

"Nothing! Nothing," he cried quickly, as if denying an allegation made.

She withdrew her eyes but stood for a long moment with knit brows before she proceeded disheartenedly with her work.

The following day it was Worthy who went first, early in the morning, to get stovewood. She had gone with a purpose, because she had lain awake all night hearing—perhaps she had been fanciful, morbid, in her thoughts—the sound as of a child's voice crooning. It even seemed to her that she had distinguished words.

"Beloved! Beloved!" the voice seemed murmuring plaintively.

She told herself that she must check her vain imaginings, born of brooding over Anice's tragic death. She realized that the event of that last night of the blizzard had wrought up her nerves to finest tension. But she felt she must satisfy herself once for all that her fancies were absolutely unfounded, so that her reason could in future rebuke her wandering imagination.

Therefore she went with faltering but determined step to the woodshed and opened the door, the key to which she had herself retained since the preceding day. Yesterday she had removed a number of wooden boxes from under the shelf where the doll lay, and pushed them to the other side of the shed. This morning, as she peered into the semi-darkness, she saw distinctly *that the boxes were back under the shelf, piled one upon the other, as a child might place them who desired to reach the shelf above. And further, the wax doll which yesterday her own eyes had seen lying on the shelf, was now sitting against the wall on the floor of the shed at the foot of the boxes.*

Worthy did not advance a foot across the threshold. She stood without, stupefied. Strange and dreadful thoughts assailed her and beat down upon her. She could not bear it, all at once, and fled back into the house. She made Zebedee go for the wood without telling him why she had failed to bring it. Then she went into the rarely used front room, shut the door, and remained alone there the rest of the morning.

Her husband did not disturb her. Too well he knew why she had gone away by herself. He, too, had seen the pile of boxes under the shelf, put there by other hands than his or hers; put there as if a child had piled them up to reach the shelf where had lain the forbidden plaything. He brought back wood but when he came into the kitchen again he was paler than he had ever been in his life and was trembling in every limb. The wood fell unheeded from his nerveless hands upon the floor, and he sank weakly into a chair, struggling with difficulty to compose his distressful thoughts.

Winter passed on with chill and dragging tread. Late spring found the Butterworths grayer, more worn, more wan, than even the loss of a beloved child would seem to indicate. The uncanny secret that had become a part of their lives was pulling them down both mentally and physically. By May, Worthy had grown so weak that Zebedee hitched up one morning and hurriedly drove to get the doctor.

Serena Lovejoy saw him pass and surmised his errand, for her farm adjoined the Butterworth place. She ran across the private road between the

two farms and made an unexpected visit to Worthy. At first glance Serena divined that here was no malady of body but the gnawing canker of mental sickness. Halfway measures never suited her, so she abruptly opened the subject to her hostess.

"Better tell me about it, Worthy," she said with direct simplicity. "I half believe I know, already, what is troubling you. Perhaps I can find the way out."

Worthy looked long and deeply into the gravely tender eyes of her neighbor.

"Perhaps you can," she considered. Then with sudden sharp pain wracking her soul: "Serena, she is not at rest in her grave! My poor little baby comes back every night, to play with her wax doll!"

"Poor baby!" murmured Serena understandingly. She was credited in Ellersville with being a seeress. "Go on, poor soul. Tell me the rest."

"I cannot bear it," wailed the wretched Worthy, her hands pressed agonizedly to her temples. "There is no night that I can sleep. Always I hear her voice calling 'Beloved!' What can I do—what can I do—to give peace to my baby's soul?"

She broke down, sobbing into her hands hysterically.

Serena regarded her with mingled pity and reproach. She shook her head slowly. Then she put a gentle hand on the weeping mother's shoulder.

"Stop crying and listen to me," she commanded. "Give me the key to the woodshed. I promise you, Worthy, you will hear no crying tonight."

It was as she said. That night the bereaved parents slept as they had not slept for months. Worthy went across the road the next morning to ask Serena how such peace had been wrought.

"Go down to the burial ground, to Anice's grave," Serena responded quietly. "I think then you will understand."

And so it was that Worthy Butterworth received the bitterest lesson of all her repressed life.

Sitting against the little headstone that marked the grave of "Anice Butterworth, aged nine years and three weeks," was the gaily dressed plaything that had been the innocent cause of the tragedy. Smiling fixedly, blue glass eyes meaningless under fringed lids, the wax doll waited patiently for night to bring its playmate back. Anice had not far to go to find her Beloved, any more.

As the graves of Indian chiefs are loaded with the good things of life that their spirits may attend upon the phantom of the dead, so today the grave of Anice is never without a new toy, reverently and with bitter remorse left there by the hands of her parents.

And the Christmas tree with its wonderful adornments, that each Yuletide presides over the Sunday School room of the Methodist Church, is the annual gift of Zebedee and Worthy Butterworth in the name of Anice, to the children of Ellersville.

And Anice Requiescat in pace.

The Forest of Lost Men

by Beatrice Grimshaw

The knack of catching the special breath of perfumed adventure that goes with the tropical breezes of jungle islands is one that not every writer can possess. Beatrice Grimshaw is one of the fortunate, for there is something of the South Sea isles which strikes the poetic fancy—their remoteness, the apparent idyllic lack of history, their primitive lushness. To only a few is it given to be able to describe that extra verieness that hangs in the air of these remaining bits of "terra incognita." In this instance, Miss Grimshaw may have been assisted by something more substantial than a mood. For in a note she says that "names, dates and to some extent circumstances have been altered, but the Forest of Lost Men exists."



DON'T mind talking to you (he said)—you've been in the big bush yourself, and you know.

It's those new chums I can't stand, the fellows out from Home that knows it all before they ever set foot on a coral beach. They know everything, and they believe nothing; if you tell them anything that couldn't have happened at four o'clock in the afternoon in the Strand, London, they think right off you're "having the loan of them."

It was one of that kind that went up the Kikiramu with me the year after the war; he couldn't learn anything, he thought—but the Kikiramu learned him.

His name was Harlow, a nice fellow enough, if he hadn't been so sure and certain that human knowledge began and ended with what they stuff down their throats in lectures. Cambridge, he was—science of some sort; one of the lost chicks of them exploring expeditions that come out every year in the dry, to find what no one's ever found before. And maybe some of them does find it, those who get fever and die; but the rest of 'em never finds much beyond the last plantation in the hills, where they can get a drink.

And they spend their money, and go home, them who can; but the rest stops, and sometimes it's bad for them. I've known one to sit down in an

armchair in broad daylight in front of a hotel and blow his brains out with a revolver that was bought but not paid for at the store.

Harlow hadn't got to that yet; he had a bit left, and he was all on to gamble and make it more, like they do in the books about Monty Carlo. I'd been south with a good shammy (*to Sydney with a lot of gold*), and I was back, broke. Where there's gold in New Normandy—and it isn't an island proper, but a country of itself, so gold takes finding—I'll find it. I've lived that way, cleaning up a thousand or so a year, but spent it as quick as it came, ever since the Second Jubilee.

Well, we got together, and went up the Kikiramu, mates. You know how it is when you're mates with a man; you've got to find the best in him, and be in you; and you've got to stick, no matter what happens. I could tell you things—but you've lived in the bush yourself: you know. . . .

After we'd had a week together on the river, crawling up it in a canoe, and camping among the alligators in the mud, and being bit by sand-flies and mosquitoes about all the time, though sometimes worse, I got to like Harlow quite a bit, because all the time I was learning him, and it's natural.

I learned him to "crack hardy" when it rained on us twelve inches in six hours, and the flour got melted, and the bed-sacks, so that you could have wrung a horse's ration of water out of them. And when we walked so far the first day we landed that we ached too much to sleep, but by four o'clock we had to be up and on, for a worse day! Things like that. It done him so much good, you wouldn't believe.

But for all I was making him over, I couldn't get him to change his mind about the things and people in the bush, which he knew nothing of any more than a monkey knows about mathematics. Of course, he let on he knew everything.

We got to the field, which was at the bottom of a river gorge thousands of feet deep, and I staked claims for both, and we set our boys to work getting down to the wash. There was unknown tribes about us in the bush, which was a hundred or two feet high, and as thick as hairs on a new hair-brush. I didn't take any notice of them, and they took none of us, except sometimes when they came and pegged spears among us, themselves hid so that you couldn't see 'em. I'd fire a shot at random, and let it go. But Harlow, he was keen as terriers after rats, about those useless heathen. Keener than he was after the gold. Most of the work was done by me, in fact; as soon as he knew (for I was fool enough to tell him) that the Lakalakas was unknown to whites, you couldn't hold him.

"Let them alone, and they'll let you alone," I told him, one night when we were sitting together as far away from the boys' camp-fires as we could get, fighting mosquitoes over a little smoke of our own. "If once you get them snake-headed," I told him, "they'll show their spite—catch a boy and roast him alive on a stick, maybe. They're used to being shot at," I told him, "but don't you go trying to find any of their villages, not if you value your life, and want to keep your signed-on labor."

He said, sitting there over the smoke, with his face dirty, but white under

the dirt, and his eyes as big and blue as a girl's full of that sort of ginger that one likes to see: "The name of science," says he, "is sacred," says he. "If I don't come to the claim tomorrow," he says, "you'll know I've gone to look."

He didn't come. That was the best day we'd had so far; it was Saturday, and I cleaned up, and it ran about a hundred ounces for the week; so, if you understand, I was pretty busy, and pretty well pleased, and hadn't much thought left for young Harlow. I reckoned he'd be all right.

When he came back, he dropped like a pig when you club it, right in the doorway of the tent. "I'm done," he said. "But oh, Tim Monahan," says he, "I'm so happy I could die this minute!"

Then he told me what he'd seen. He had that sort of beginner's luck makes a man lift gold out of a creek first time he tries, and maybe never again. He'd found what no one else had found,—a village of the Lakalakas—and they hadn't killed him for doing it. They were more or less pigmy, he told me, not the size of a boy of twelve, but bunches of muscle, and all naked except for boar-tusks and shells; and they had spears all carved and painted, like the ones they use to peg at us in the dark. He danced before them and sang, to show it was peace, and they were that pleased they took him by the hand, and led him to the men's house, which was full of all manner of queer things—heads and dried guts, among them. And it was too dark for photos, but he said, when he went away, "I'll come back," and made signs about returning.

"What do you think of it?" says he.

"I don't think," says I. "I've enough to do looking after two teams of boys and two men's claims, without taking time off to think."

"I'm sorry," says he, all grieved. "I didn't—I'm afraid I've not been exactly playing the game; but after I've got my photos," says he, "it'll be all right." And he went to sleep.

I called up my head boy by and by, a wicked young savage that I liked quite a bit, and he knew it, and would tell me things.

"What do you reckon they let him go for?" I said. "I remember a mate of mine when the Wakaka field broke out, that was taken and eat alive for less—eat by bits, cutting off what they wanted. And I went through a village for it, afterward. . . . What do you reckon?"

The boy said, straight away: "They think him mad."

"Oh!" says I. I understand. Savages won't kill a madman. But they will do queer things to him, if he gets across their hawser, in a way of speaking.

The boy stood up in the firelight, with the smoke curling round him like he was some picture of a heathen god in the clouds; a fine chap he was, clean as bronze, and clever in his own way; and it came to me then, how little we knew about any of them, after all.

"The Lakalakas," he said, "are very great sorcerers."

I didn't laugh, at that; nor you wouldn't. You know. . . .

"Well," said I, passing him out a fig of tobacco, to keep him going, "what sort do they do?"

He said something then that I can't translate; it was a native word meaning something like enchantment, putting spells on you; but, if you get me, it had to do with your surroundings too, and the way they was related to you. "Oh," says I at once, "you mean the cursed forest."

He didn't say any more; he bit the fig of tobacco, and moved away, and I knew he meant: "You've got enough for your money." So I shut up.

But I thought a bit that night in spite of what I'd said about thinking; and in the morning I said to my mate: "You've got a nice little locket hanging on your watch-chain."

"If I have," said he, "whose business is—"

"I'm not asking what's in it," I said. "I lay she's a bonzer little lassie, anyhow. I reckon you'd better think about her, and think twice, before you set out after them Lakalaka men again. You got away once," says I, "and I reckon they won't kill you; but—"

"You mind your mining," he says, "and I'll attend to my science."

Well, I don't believe in interfering with people's fancies, even with the best intentions; many a man has spoiled a nice profile doing it. So I said no more. But I noticed him opening up the locket, later on that night, and looking hard at what was inside. If I happened to be walking behind him just at that moment, it was no fault of mine; and if I had a girl with that kind of hair that shows gold even in a photo, and eyes like hers, I wouldn't mind anybody taking a look. . . . She was handsome enough, too—I don't mean Harlow's lass. But she couldn't do with the mining; women are that way. And gold-mining, you never know how the years go. . . . I pay a bloke in Sydney to keep a few flowers on her grave, but most like he drinks the money. . . .

Well, I'm sorry; this isn't my yarn. I meant to say, that Harlow was as near as nothing to taking my advice, and keeping off of the Lakalakas. But he didn't. And next day he went out, and didn't come back.

When he'd been away a day and a night, I started after him. I took two or three carriers with me, loaded no more than thirty pounds apiece, because I thought there was maybe going to be work. One of them was the boy I'd been talking to; Hanua was his name.

"If you see one of the Lakalaka dogs," says I, "sing out." For though you never see one of the tribe unless they wanted, the dogs gave them away sometimes, coming and going for a drink, or looking at you out of the bush; small black dogs they were, that never made a noise, and didn't look natural nor real. Like the ghosts of dogs that have died and gone to hell, I used to think.

To walk through that country, it's like an ant going up and down the teeth of a comb. We climbed till the sweat ran off us like rain off a roof, and we went down sliding, and climbing again; and so it went on all morning till about one o'clock, when I called a halt, and got out the food.

While we were eating our tin and biscuit, Hanua, sitting near me, caught me by the arm and pointed. The small wicked face of a black dog was look-

ing out of the bush, just where you couldn't have taken two steps without cutting your way. I think it smelled the tinned meat, but it would come no nearer, not even when I threw a bit at it. It just lifted its lips and cursed us, like, and then it wasn't there.

But now I knew the Lakalakas was following us.

So did the carriers; and before I had time to do anything but pull my revolver out of my belt, not even time to threaten them with it, they had dropped their loads and was away. You can't follow a naked native into the bush. In two minutes, with hardly as much noise as would wake a sleeping cat, they had got down the side of the nearest gully, and was running along the stones at the bottom; and that was all I ever saw of them again. Or anyone else. . . . What? I don't know, and I don't want to think; some of them was decent boys enough.

Hanua, he finished chewing the wad of meat and biscuit he had in his mouth, and then he says: "You-me go look, suppose you die, me die." And he wiped his mouth with the back of his hand, and stood up. And I clapped him on the shoulder, and I says: "Suppose no die, you live with me."

It was up and down again after that, up and down fit to break the heart of a goat or any army mule, only neither one of them could have gone where we were going. And hot. And there was snakes; I trod on a tiger snake, and he just missed me; and one of them pythons swung out of a tree, yards of him, at Hanua, but Hanua slashed his head off with his clearing-knife, and never looked behind. We didn't have any time to spare; we were making for the village in the hills, and wanted to get there before dark, always provided the Lakalakas didn't spear us first.

Why they did not, considering they must have been following all the time, was what I didn't understand, and didn't much like. We saw no more of them, nor their dogs. And when we come, after an hour or more, on a bit of flat ground, the relief was that wonderful that I could have laid down and slept, just where I was.

It was thick with forest, bigger and blacker than any I had seen before. I couldn't remember the like of the trees, not exactly; they had red papery trunks, that bled like arms and legs when you hit them; and their leaves, a good way up, were long and thin like worms. A kind of fir-tree, maybe, but I didn't know it. It smelled bad in there, the sort of smell there is in a butcher's shop on a hot day; but there was nothing to account for it—it seemed just to be in the air. The bush ropes that tangled everything together, and that you had to cut through, same as in other places, wasn't like common bush ropes, not plain brown and green; but they was spotted red, and dirtied up with white, as if some one'd been spilling blood and brains on them. . . . What? Oh, yes, you do see that sort of thing in the bush, but not that much of it.

I stood on the edge of it all looking in, and I didn't like the look of it, but it was on the line I'd marked out with the compass, and we couldn't afford

to waste time. So in we went, and Hanua, he pulled a long breath or two through his teeth, and said nothing, but I knew what he thought.

"Come on, old son," I says, clapping his shoulder. "It can't take us ten minutes to go through, judging by the lie of the hills and the river, and I don't hold with that heathen rubbish, anyhow." For you see, there was chat about that place, though no other white man had ever seen it; and they said that it was cursed, in a way, and that when you got in, you couldn't get out again.

You may believe me or you may not, but I've looked up the place since, and there isn't room for it, anywhere, unless in a spot that's no more than half a mile across. Judging, that is, by the lie of the river, which we did map out careful, and did know—rivers with gold in them gets mapped out soon and good. I tell you, there's no room for it—but all the same, the boy and I walked all afternoon, and we didn't get across it. The compass was no good; I reckoned there must be an outcrop of ironstone somewhere about, though I can't say I seen it. We blazed the way as we went, and we didn't come back on any of our blazes.

When it came near dark, we undid the bit of tarpaulin that we carried instead of a tent, and we didn't light any fire, because of the Lakalakas. And Hanua and me, we sat down beside one another, because I reckoned he was a man, for all he was a naked savage, and we talked a bit, quiet, in his own native talk.

He says: "This is the Forest of Lost Men."

I says: "I've heard of it, but I don't understand. What is it?"

He says: "The sorcerers of the Lakalakas are greater than any other sorcerers, and they have put spells, big spells, on this place, and it goes for miles and miles. And it isn't really there, more than a little bit of it," he says: "but once you get into it, you go on walking and walking, and you walk till maybe you die."

"*Koi-koi!*" says I, which is what you say in the Islands, when you mean damn' nonsense.

"No *koi-koi!*" he says, and sits with his head on his hand.

We never slept; it wasn't a place to sleep in. There was queer noises, like children crying, but there weren't no children there. You weren't quite sure if you was there yourself; but all the same you knew, worse luck, that you was nowhere else. When the light came, late, through all those trees, we up and ate a bit. And we walked. And we walked. Like they used to do in Flanders, when the roads was a thousand miles long before a halt. And we walked.

And that night we slept a little, but we were hungry, because the food was near gone. And next day we walked. And we walked. And there was almost nothing left to eat, and no water except what we licked off the leaves of the trees in the early morning. And all the time it was the dark trees with the wormy leaves, and the bush ropes spotted dirty white and red. There

was no footmarks, nor anything of that kind; but we found a bit of necktie stuck on a thorn, and it was blue with stripes, the color of Harlow's school tie, which he thought a lot of. So we knew we were on the right track, if that was any good to anyone, we being all in the same box now.

End of the next day, Hanua says: "They been following us somewhere outside this place," he says; "and when we drop, they'll come in. The sorcerers will come and take us away," he says, "and even the dogs will be full tonight," he says.

All of a sudden I gave a whoop. "The dogs!" I says. You see, I'd got an idea. I was a cattle-hand once in the Northern Territory, and it learns you to be quick. Or dead.

"I reckon," I says, talking to myself for a bit, "that you can't enchant a dog. If there's such a thing as enchantment. Because," I says to myself, "you must have a soul for them games, and a dog he has no soul."

We'd kept one little bit of meat for the last, and I took it, and used the last of the matches to make fire with. And I hung the meat before the fire on a scrap of bark fiber, and I cut myself a length of small bush rope, tough as a whip. And I waited.

It was near half an hour before the thing I was waiting for, happened. Just as the light was beginning to go, at the time those dogs come out to get a drink in the rivers, and hunt food in the bush,—because their masters they don't feed them, except when there's plenty of roast enemy about,—just then, I saw a small black wicked face looking out of the bush, and a small black snout working up and down, at the smell of the cooking meat.

Hanua, he didn't move no more than one of the trees, and I stayed quiet. The dog put out its head, and half its body, and then it stopped. But that was enough for me; I had the loop of the bush creeper around its body, from twenty feet away, before you could wink,—and it kicking like a roped bullock, more than you'd think that anything ten times its size could have done.

We got the tarpaulin over it in a minute, and it bit right through it like it was an alligator, and near took a piece out of me. It did get a bite at Hanua, before we had the rope knotted safe around its neck, and let it go.

We kept hold of that rope the way a drowning man keeps hold of the life-line they throw him from the beach. And we followed the dog, where it went. And in ten minutes—you may call me a liar if you like, because it don't make any difference to me—we were out of the wood, and it was only a black patch of trees behind us, looking not much bigger than you could throw a stone across.

We cut the line, and let the little devil of a dog go; and Hanua, he burned his arm with a firestick, to take the poison out. And we got back to the camp, I don't just know how, for it came on dark in no time at all, and the compass was still cronk—is to this day.

Afterwards we had all the men on the field out looking, and maybe we found the wood that was cursed, and maybe we didn't; there was nothing

to tell us. If we did, it wasn't working, for nobody got lost. But I reckon we never came across it at all.

We didn't find Harlow, either. Only the other half of his necktie, floating down the river, miles away. . . .

What? Oh, no, they don't kill lunatics; and they didn't kill him. He turned up again, like his necktie. It was in Sydney, a year after, and no one knows to this day what he saw, or how he got down to the coast again. The yarn he pitched—and he quite believed it—was that he had looked for the Lakalaka villages, didn't find any, never saw the tribes at all, and had an attack of fever in the bush that took away his memory.

I don't know about fever. Something did; that's sure. The less you know about those matters, the better; I'd sell a lot of what I remember, for half of nothing with the tail cut off.

I sent his share of the gold we won. It was after that that he got married, to the girl in the locket. . . . Me? No. The bush has got me, and you know what that is.

The Place of Pain

by M. P. Shiel

The late Matthew Phipps Shiel is noted for his novel "The Purple Cloud" and for a score of lesser novels marked for complexity of style and unorthodoxy of plot. From this editor's viewpoint, complexity is the factor which was Shiel's greatest handicap to popularity—many of his best fantastic imaginings are couched in such a painfully tortured phraseology, replete with obscure wordage, and punctuation that follows some mystical rules unknown to earthly grammar. There are several extraordinary Shiel stories we would reprint save for their near-unreadability. "The Place of Pain" is probably one of Shiel's simpler tales—an unusual idea with a scientific basis.



THOUGH my theme is about the place of evil, and about how the Rev. Thomas Podd saw it, it is rather a case of evil in heaven: for I think British Columbia very like heaven, or like what I shall like my heaven to be, if ever I arrive so high—one mass of mountains, with mirrors of water mixed up with them, torrents and forests, and roaring Rhones.

It was at Small Forks that it happened, where I went to pass a fortnight—and stayed five years; and how the place changed and developed in that short time is really incredible, for at first Small Forks was the distributing center of only three mining-camps, and I am sure that not one quarter of the district's two million tons of ore of today was then thought of.

At the so-called Scatchereen Lode, three miles from the lake, there was one copper smelter, but not one silver-lead mine within fifty miles, and no brewery, no machine-shop, no brick plant. Nor had Harper Falls as yet been thought of as a source of power.

It was Harper Falls that proved to be the undoing of Pastor Thomas Podd, as you are to hear; and I alone have known that it was so, and why it was so.

I think I saw Podd in my very first week at Small Forks—one evening on the Embankment.

(You may know that Small Forks runs along the shore of an arm of Lake Sakoonay, embowered in bush at the foot of its mountains—really very like a nook in Paradise, to my mind.)

Podd that evening was walking with another parson on the Embankment, and the effect of him upon me was the raising of a smile, my eye at that time being unaccustomed to the sight of black men in parsons' collars and frocks. But Podd was rather brown than black—a meagre little man of fifty, with prominent cheek bones, hollow cheeks, a scraggy rag of beard, a cocky carriage, and a forehead really intellectual, though his eyes did strike me as rather wild and scatterbrained.

He was a man of established standing in all Small Forks, where a colony of some forty colored persons worked at the lumber-mills. To these Podd preached in a corrugated chapel at the top of Peel Street.

He held prayer-meetings on Monday nights, and one Monday night, when I had been in Small Forks a month or so, I stepped into his conventicle, on coming home from a tramp, and heard the praying—or, rather, the demanding for those darkies banged the pew-backs and shook them irritably.

When it was over and I was going out, I felt a tap on my back, and it was the reverend gentleman, who had raced after the stranger. Out he pops his pompous paw, and then, with a smile, asked if I was "thinking of joining us." I was not doing that, but I said that I had been "interested," and left him.

Soon after this he called to see me, and twice in three months he had tea with me—in the hope of a convert, perhaps. He did not succeed in this, but he did succeed in interesting me.

The man had several sciences at his finger-ends; I discovered that he had a genuine passion for Nature; and I gathered—from himself, or from others, I can't now remember—that it was his habit ever and anon to cut himself off from humankind, so as to lose himself for a few days in that maze of mountains in which the Sakooney district towers toward the moon.

No pressure of business, no consideration or care, could keep Podd tame and quiet in Small Forks when this call of the wild enticed him off. It seems to have been long a known thing about the town, this trick of his character, and to have been condoned and pardoned as part of the man. He had been born within forty miles of Small Forks, and seemed to me to know Columbia as a farmer knows his two-acre meadow.

Well, some two weeks after that second visit of his to me the news suddenly reached me that something had gone wrong in the Rev. Thomas Podd's head—could not help reaching me, for the thing was the gossip and laugh of the district far outside Small Forks.

It appears that late on the Saturday evening the reverend gentleman had come home from one of his vast tramps and truant interviews with Nature; then, on the Sunday morning, he had entered the meeting-house scandalously late, and had reeled with the feet of some moon-struck creature into the pulpit—without his coat! without his collar! his braces hanging down!—and then, leaning his two elbows on the pulpit Bible, he had looked steadily, mockingly, at his flock of black sheep, and had proceeded to jeer and sneer at them.

He had called them frankly a pack of apes, a band of black and babbling

babies; said that he could pity them from his heart, they were so benighted, so lost in darkness; that what they knew in their woolly nuts was just nothing; that no one knew, save him, Podd; that he alone of men know what he knew, and had seen what he had seen. . . .

Well, he had been so much respected for his intellectual parts, his eloquence, his apparent sincerity as a Christian man, that his congregation seem to have taken this gracelessness with a great deal of toleration, hoping perhaps that it might be only an aberration which would pass; but when the revered gentleman immediately afterwards took himself off anew into his mountains, to disappear for weeks—no one knew where—that was too much. So when he came back at last, it was to see another dark parson filling his place.

From that moment his social degeneration was rapid. He abandoned himself to poverty and tatters. His wife and two daughters shook the dust of him from off their shoes, and left Small Forks—to find a livelihood for themselves somewhere, I suppose. But Podd remained, or, at any rate, was often to be met in Small Forks, when he condescended to descend from his lofty walks.

Once I saw him intoxicated on the Embankment, his braces down, his hat in tatters—though I am certain that he never became a drunkard. Anyway, the thin veneer of respectability came off him like wet paint, and he slipped happily back into savagery. On what he lived I don't know.

I met him one afternoon by the new shipbuilding yard which the Canadian Pacific Railway was running up half a mile out of Small Forks. He sat there on a pile of axed pine-trunks lying by the roadside, his chest and one shin showing through his rags, his eyes gloating on the sky, in which a daylight moon was swooning; but, on catching sight of me, he showed his fine rows of teeth, crying out flippantly in French: "*Ah, monsieur, ça va bien?*"—in French, because Negroes are given to a species of frivolity in speech which expresses itself in that way.

I stopped to speak to him, asking "What has it been all about, Podd—the sudden collapse from sanctity to naughtiness?"

"Ah, now you are asking something!" he answered flippantly, with a wink at me.

I saw that he had become woefully emaciated and saffron, his cheek-bones seeming to be near appearing through their sere skin, and his eyes had in them the fire of a man living a life of some continual exaltation or excitement.

I wished, if I could, to help him and I said "Something must have gone wrong inside or out; better make a clean breast of it, and then something may be done."

On this he suddenly became fretful, saying "Oh, you all think like a blame lot of silly little babies fumbling in the dark!"

"That is so," I answered; "but since you are wise, why not tell us the secret, and then we shall all be wise?"

"I tell you what"—shaking his head up and down, his lips turned

down—"I doubt if some of them could stand the sight; turn their hairs white!"

"Which sight?" I asked.

"The sight of Hell!" he sighed, throwing up his hand a little.

After a little silence I said "Now, that's rot, Podd."

"Yes, sure to be, Sir, since you say so," he answered quietly in a dejected way. "That, of course, is what they said to Galileo when he told them that this globe moves."

With as grave a face as I could maintain, I looked at him, asking "Have you seen Hell, Podd?"

"I may have," he answered; and he added "And so have you, by the way. You have probably seen it since you started out on this walk you are taking, and haven't known."

"Well, it can't be very terrible, can it," I said, "if one can see it and not know? But is Hell in Small Forks? For I'm straight from there."

At this he threw up his head with a rather bitter laugh saying "Yes, that's beautiful, that the ignorant should make game of those who know, and the worse be judges of the better! But, then, that's how it generally is." And now, all at once, whatever blood he had rushed into his face, and he pointed upward: "You see that world there?"

"The moon?" I said, looking up.

"The souls in that place live in pain," I heard him murmur, his chin suddenly sunken to his chest.

"So there are people on the moon, Podd?" I asked. "Surely you know that there is no air there? Or do you mean to imply that the moon is Hell?"

He looked up, smiling. "My, goodness, you'd give a lot to know, wouldn't you? Well, look here, I'll say this and it's the truth: that I've had a liking for you from the first, and I'll make you a business proposition, as it's you. You agree to give me three dollars a week so long as I live, and when I'm dying I'll tell you what I know, and how, teaching you the whole trick. Or I'll put it in writing in a sealed envelope, which you shall have on my death."

"Dear me," I said, "what a pity I can't afford it!"

"You can afford it well enough," was his answer, "but the truth is that you don't believe a word of what I say: you think I'm moonstruck. And so I am, a bit! By Heaven, that's true enough!"

He sighed and was silent some time, looking at the moon in a most abstracted manner, apparently forgetting my presence.

But presently he went on to say "Still, a spec., you might risk it. The payments wouldn't be for long, for I've developed consumption, I see—the curse of us colored folks—had a hemorrhage only yesterday. And then, as a charity, you might, for I'm mostly hungry—my own fault; but I couldn't keep on gassing to those poor fools, after seeing what I have seen. If you won't give me the three dollars a week, give me one."

Well, to this I consented—not, of course, in any expectation of ever hearing any "secret", but I saw that the man had become quite unworldly,

unfit to earn his living, I considered him more or less insane—still consider so, though I am convinced now that he was not nearly so insane as I conceived: so I promised him that he might draw a weekly dollar from my bank while I was in Small Forks.

Sometimes Podd drew his dollar, but often he did not, though he was aware that arrears would not be paid, if he failed to present himself any week. And so it went on for over four years, during which he became more and more emaciated, and a savage.

Meantime, Small Forks and the Sakoonay district had ceased to laugh at the name of Podd, as at a stale joke, and the fact of his rags and degradation had become a local institution, like the Mounted Police or the sawdust mill—too familiar a thing in the eye to excite any kind of emotion in the mind.

But at the end of those four years Small Forks, like one man, rose against Podd.

It happened in this way: at that date the Sakoonay district was sending an annual cut of some four hundred million feet of lumber to the Prairie Provinces; the mining and smelter companies had increased to four—big concerns, treating three to four thousand tons of ore a day; in which consideration of things all through the district had arisen the cry: "Electricity! Electricity!"

Hence the appearance in Small Forks of the Provincial Mineralogist with a pondering and responsible forehead; hence his report to the Columbian Government that Harper Falls were capable of developing 97,000 horse-power; hence a simmering of interest through the district; and hence the decision of the Small Forks Town Council to inaugurate a municipal power-plant at Harper Falls.

But Podd objected!

He thought—this is what I found out afterwards—that Harper Falls were his; and he did not wish to have them messed with, or people coming anywhere near them.

However, he said nothing; the new works were commenced—so far as the accumulation of material was concerned; and the first hint of a hitch in the business was given one midnight at the beginning of May—a night I'll ever remember—when the mass of the municipality's material was burnt to cinders.

The blaze made a fine display five miles out of Small Forks, and I witnessed it in the thick of a great crowd of the townspeople.

It was assumed that the thing had been deliberately done by someone, since there was no other explanation. But the mystery as to who had done it!—for there was no one to suspect. And, like a spider whose web has been torn, the municipality started once more to collect materials for the plant.

Then, at the end of June, occurred the second blaze.

But this time there were night-watchmen with open eyes, and one of them deposed that he believed that he had seen Podd suspiciously near the scene of the mischief.

The town was very irritated about it, since the power-plant was expected to do great things for everybody.

At any rate, when Podd was captured and questioned, he did not exactly deny.

"It might have been I," was his answer; and "what if it was I?"

And this answer was a proof to me that he was innocent, for I took it to be actuated by vanity or insanity. The authorities must have thought so, too, for the man was dismissed as a ninny.

The town, however, was indignant at his dismissal; and three days later I came upon him in the midst of a crowd, from which I doubt that he could have come out alive, but for me, for he was now nothing but a bundle of bones, lighted up by two eyes. Indeed, my interference was rather plucky of me, for there present was a North-West policeman lending his countenance to the hustling of the poor outcast, a real-estate agent, the sawdust-mill manager, reeking of turpentine, and others, whose place it was to have interfered. Anyhow, I howled a little speech, pledging myself that the man was innocent; and my eclat as a Briton, perhaps, helped me to get him gasping out of their grasp.

When he found himself alone with me on the road outside the town, down he suddenly knelt, and, grasping my legs, began to sob to me in a paroxysm of gratitude.

"You have been everything to me—you, a stranger. God reward you—I have not long to live, but you shall know what I know, and see what I have seen."

"Podd," I said, "you have heard me pledge my word that you are innocent. Let me hear from you this instant that it was not you who committed those outrages."

With the coolest insolence he stood up, looked in my face, and said, "Of course I committed them. Who else?"

I had to laugh. But then I sternly observed "Well, but you confess yourself a felon, that's all."

"Look here," he answered, "let's not quarrel. We see from different standpoints—let's not quarrel. What I say is, that during the few weeks or months I have to live no plant is going to be set up at Harper Falls—afterwards, yes. You don't know what I know about the Falls. They are the eye of this world; that's it—the eye of this world. But you shall know and see"—he looked up at the westering quarter-moon, thought a little, and continued: "Meet me here at nine on Friday night. You've done a lot for me."

The man's manner was so convincing, that I undertook to meet him, though some minutes afterwards I laughed at myself for being so impressed by his pratings.

Anyway, two nights thence, at nine, I met Podd, and we began a tramp and climb of some seven miles which I shall ever remember.

If I could but give some vaguest impression of that bewitched adventure,

I should begin to think well of my power of expression; but the reality of it would still be far from pictured.

That little dying Podd had still the foot of a goat, and we climbed spots which, but for his aid, I could scarcely have negotiated—ghostly gullies, woods of spruce and dreary old cedar droning, the crags of Garroway Pass, where a throng of torrents awe one's ear, and tarns asleep in the dark of forests of larch, of hemlock, of white and yellow pine.

We were struggling upward through a gullock of Garroway Pass when Podd stopped short; and when I groped for him—for one could see nothing there—I discovered him with his forehead leant against the crag.

To my question, "Anything wrong?" he answered "Wait a little—there's blood in my mouth."

And he added "I think I am going to have a hemorrhage."

"We had better go pack," I said.

But he presently brightened up, saying "It will be all right. Come."

We stumbled on.

Half an hour afterwards we came out upon a platform about eight hundred yards square, surrounded by cliffs of pine on three sides. A torrent dropped down the back cliff, ran over most of the platform in a rather broad river, lacerated by rocks, and dropped frothing in a cataract over the front of the platform.

"Here we are," Podd said, seating himself on a rock, dropping his forehead to his knees.

"Podd, you are in trouble," I said, standing over him.

He made no answer, but presently raised himself with an effort, to look at the moon with eyes that were themselves like moons—the satellite, about half-full, then waxing; and now in her setting quadrant.

"Now, look you," Podd said with pantings and tremblings, so that I had to bend down to hear him in that row of the waters, "I have brought you here because I love you a lot. You are about to see things that no mortal's eye but mine ever wept salt water at—"

As he uttered those words, I, for the first time, with a kind of shock, realized that I was really about to see something boundless for I could no longer doubt that those pantings had the accent of truth; in fact, I suddenly knew that they were true, and my heart began to beat faster.

"But how will you take the sight?" he went on. "Am I really doing you a service? You see the effect it has had on me—to think that what made us—our own—should bring forth such bitterness! No, you shan't see it all, not the worst bit: I'll stop the view there. You see that fall rushing down at our feet? I have the power, by placing a certain rock in a certain position in this river, to change that mass of froth into a mass of glass—two masses of glass—immense lenses, double-convex. Discovered it by accident one night five years since—night of my life. No, I am not well tonight. But never mind. You go down the face of the rock at the side here—easy going—till you come to the cave. Go into the cave; then climb by the notches which you'll find in the wall, till you come to a ledge, one edge of which

is about two feet behind the inner eyepiece. The moon should begin to come within your view within four minutes from now; and I give you a five-minutes' sight—no more. You'll see her some three hundred yards from you tearing across your brain like ten trillion trains. But never you tell any man what you see on her. Go, go! Not very well tonight."

He stood up with an effort so painful, that I said to him "But are you going into the river, Podd, and trembling like that already? Why not show me how to place the rock for you?"

"No," he muttered, "you shan't know; you shan't! It's all right; I'll manage; you go. Keep moving your eye at first till you get the focus-length. There's a lot of prismatic and spherical aberration, iridescent fringes, and the yellow line of the spectrum of sodium bothers everywhere—the object-glass is so big and so thin, that it hardly seems at all to decompose light. Never mind, you'll see well—upside down, of course—dioptric-telescope images. Go, go; don't waste time; I'll manage with the stone. And you must always say—I paid you back—full measure—for all your love."

At every third word of all this his breast gave up a gasp, and his eyes were most wild with excitement or the fever of disease. He pushed and led me to the spot where I was to descend. And "There she comes," his tongue stuttered, with a nod at the moon, as he flew from me, while I went feeling my way with my feet, the cataract at my right, down a cliff-side that was nearly perpendicular, but so rugged and shrub-grown, that the descent was easy.

When I was six feet down I lifted my chin to the ledge, and saw Podd stooping within some bush at the foot of the platform-cliff to my left, where he had evidently hidden the talisman-rock; and I saw him lift the rock, and go tottering under its weight toward the river.

But the thought came to me that it was hardly quite fair to spy upon him, and when he was still some yards from the river I went on down—a long way—until I came to the floor of a cave in the cliff face, a pretty roomy cavern, fretted with spray from the cataract in front of it.

I went in and climbed to the ledge, as he had said; and there in the dark I lay waiting, wet through, and, I must confess, trembling, hearing my heart knocking upon my ribs through that solemn oratory of the torrent dropping in froth in front of me. And presently through the froth I thought I saw a luminous something that must have been the moon, moving by me.

But the transformation of the froth into the lenses which I awaited did not come.

At last I lifted my voice to howl "Hurry up, Podd!"—though I doubted if he could hear.

Anyway, no answer reached my ear, and I waited on.

It must have been twenty minutes before I decided to climb down; I then scrambled out, clambered up again, disgusted and angry, though I don't think that I ever believed that Podd had wilfully made a fool of me. I thought that he had somehow failed to place the rock.

But when I got to the top I saw that the poor man was dead.

He lay with his feet in the river, his body on the bank, his rock clasped in his arms. The weight had proved too much for him: on the rock was blood from his lungs.

Two days later I buried him up there with my own hands by his river's brink, within the noise of the song of his waterfall, his stupendous telescope—his "eye of this world."

And then for three months, day after day, I was endeavouring in that solitude up there so to place the rock in the river as to transform the froths of the waterfall into frothless water. But I never managed. The secret is buried with the one man whom destiny intended, maybe for centuries to come, to know what paths are trodden, and what tapestries are wrought, on another orb.

The River

by L. Major Reynolds

In presenting an original short story by an unknown author, it will be apparent to fans that there must be something out of the ordinary to compel such a deviation. "The River" is such a story. We have every reason to believe that it was widely submitted to the standard fantasy markets without avail. This is understandable, for this is no pulp story, and fits no magazine's formula. It is "different." Just why it is so, the astute reader will probably guess for himself long before the end. The story piqued our imagination when we read it in manuscript on its submission to another Avon publication . . . we knew it to be something that would be appreciated in this Reader. Here it is.



THE MAN looked uneasily at the jungle around him. It had changed until there was little that was familiar. Where had been great full-leaved trees, now was a riot of giant ferns and strange pulpy growths ran the gamut of colors.

The heat was overbearing. Beads of sweat ran down his face and trickled off his chin in a steady stream. But from somewhere he found the strength to keep up his seemingly hopeless battle against the ever present tangle of vegetation.

He fell often, and the blood mixed with the torrent of perspiration. He winced as the salty stuff stung his wounds.

It was a long time before he noticed the uncanny stillness that pervaded everything, and he tried to remember the last time he had heard the screech of a bird, or the chattering of the small monkeys that had pursued him through the leafy tangle. But it seemed uncounted ages since he had heard them.

Again he fell and this time there was no uncalled-on store of strength to help him to his feet. His body was a limp thing as it lay there, as quiet as the surrounding jungle.

A small liana, endowed with a life of its own, crept noiselessly over the crowded floor of the earth and fastened itself on one unprotected ankle. Imperceptibly it changed color from a muddy green to a ruddiness that told of its method of feeding.

The pain aroused the supine figure and the man struggled to his feet, tearing free from the plant as he rose. He looked around him seeking some way out of the nightmare that held him so tightly, but the jungle showed him nothing but closed doors.

And then in the midst of that awful silence a merry sound floated on the steamy air. The man raised his head and hope flashed in his eyes. He literally tore his way through the mass of foliage and stopped unbelieving before a crystal stream pouring from a rock; water cascading down into a basin below, and forming the headwaters of a small stream that led off through the primordial jungle.

The man clung to the rock for minutes allowing the water to cover him with its fall. For the first time he whimpered and the sound was like a sob.

Sanity returned and he pulled off his sweat-stained clothing, washing them clean in the pool beneath the spring.

All the rest of the day he soaked himself in the pool, and his hurts healed like magic. And when the sun went down he curled his naked body on the top of the rock and slept the dreamless sleep of the newborn.

The next morning he started down the stream's gravelled bed. He was sure it would, somehow, lead him to safety. It was easy walking for a long way, but finally the water rose to his hips and he could make no headway.

A log lying on the bank caught his eye, and he pulled it to the middle of the stream. It sank part way under his weight, but the travelling was easier. He floated now, with only an occasional push over the shallow spots. When night fell again, he strapped himself to his strange craft with his belt. And slept. The jungle came down to the very edge of the stream, leaving no open bank.

He lost track of time as he floated, and it was with something like awe that he saw the disintegration of the log. It literally fell apart and let him down in the now waist-deep water.

For almost a mile he alternately floated and swam. Suddenly on the bank he spied something that made him break the heavy silence with a yelp of joy.

A bark rope moored a raft to one of the giant ferns.

He was panting with eagerness as he climbed aboard and sprawled on the dryness. His water-soaked fingers tore cruelly as he pulled at the knotted rope, but they healed on the instant of tearing.

For the first time he was relaxed enough to notice the stillness that grew deeper each time he travelled. Nowhere was there a sign of animate life in the welter of growing things. He shivered in the hot steam-filled air.

The leafy tunnel now was a mass of vari-colored flowers that was almost overpowering in its perfume. The stream seemed to run slower as if time itself dragged.

The jungle still hugged the stream's edge, but as the miles floated by, the outrageous flowers dwindled and their place was taken by a mass of foliage and vines so dense that he could see no sign of the sun. Even the very air was dusky.

The man shifted uneasily on the rough bark of the logs and in spite of the heat donned the clothing he had carried since the first wonderful bath. He was all animal now. He watched down a long stretch of the shadowy tunnel and never wondered that he felt no need of sustenance. He didn't remember he had neither eaten nor drunk since the trek began.

His first warning came when he felt a subtle loosening beneath him. The bark ropes that held his craft together were splitting and pulling loose. He made a frantic grab for one of the logs, but it splintered to bits under his eager fingers.

Something bumped him between the shoulder blades, and his yell was one of pure delight as he climbed into the rough dugout.

The hollowed tree trunk was sheer luxury after the raft, and he soon managed the trick of handling it. Once more he removed all but a minimum of clothing, as the heat still remained high. The rivulets of perspiration which streamed from his body seemed an inexhaustible flow.

Imperceptibly the jungle changed. Only occasionally now was one of the giant ferns to be seen. Their place was taken by small trees, but still the mass of foliage and vines shut out the sun.

The man hung over the side of his rough craft and searched the water below. There was no sign of life in the crystal flow, and he wondered dimly at its lack.

The sight of the flowing stream against the shining gravelled bottom had almost the effect of hypnosis, and he lay back on the rough burned wood and slept.

He never saw the coracle moored to one bank, its newly tanned hides glinting in the dull light. A long spear rested across its gunwale, and the paddle showed signs of painstaking work. It faded out in the long back stretches of the stream and the man slept deeply.

He awoke and for a moment was unable to orient himself. The jungle had changed while he slept and now great trees reared their leafy heads and he could catch glimpses of clearings in what had been a solid mass of growth.

The dugout was no longer comfortable, and if he had known, he would have regretted the loss of the coracle. His craft was rotting at the edges, and the inside gave off the peculiar scent of decaying wood.

He was in the water again, watching the dugout sink slowly to the bottom of the stream, when he saw the canoe pulled up on the bank.

It was with a sense of relief that he seated himself in the craft and examined the paddle. This was no rough attempt at just something that would float. For the first time he felt confident he was nearing some sort of civilization. Something comparable to what he had known before the eternal jungle had dominated his existence.

The leafy covering over the tunnel was beginning to thin out now, and he looked eagerly for the first sight of the sun. But there was a strange thickening in the air, and a gray mist formed slowly, dropping below the tree level.

The man still searched everywhere for some form of animate life, but only the eternal green met his gaze. The heat shut down as if it were a tangible thing, and he couldn't make sense in his thoughts.

Dimly and far away he remembered another world of starlit nights and sunny days. Another world filled with the hurry and bustle of millions of his own kind. But here, the quiet of the oppressive jungle screamed its silence, and the smooth slipping of the water beneath him was unbroken by even a ripple.

He saw a rowboat moored in the center of the stream and paddled over to it, considering the advisability of changing to the newer craft. But the canoe won out, and he went on, still seeking with darting eyes some sign of the makers of the various craft.

It might have been hours, years or centuries that he stroked his way down the stream. What he could see of the jungle through the mists of fog looked strangely familiar, as if at last he had come to the tangle of great trees and vines that was the only jungle he knew.

He tried to approach the banks, but some vagary of the stream kept him from so doing, and he drifted down the watery way and wondered dimly why it should be so. The quiet tilting of the boat lulled him again to sleep, and the miles floated by unheedingly.

His watch had stopped when he awoke, and he strained his eyes for the spot of brightness that would denote the sun, but the gray mist of the fog gave no answer. It was then he realized he had seen no change in the light that surrounded him. It was all of a sameness.

For the next hour, or age, he went quietly mad. He crouched in the bottom of the canoe and babbled of clear skies and moonlit nights. Over and over he called the names of his friends, waiting each time for the answer that never came.

He buried his face in his hands and sobbed. Great tearing sobs that seemed to rend him to bits. Dry sobs, for no tears flowed in the weeping of madness. Merciful unconsciousness came.

There was no change when he finally pulled himself to a sane reality. The stream still slipped smoothly between the jungle laden banks, and the fog brooded mistily above his head. There was no sense of time, and no reality of life.

The gunwales of the canoe were raddled now, and small seepages of water came from the spot where his feet had rested for so long. He looked frantically for something else that would float, but only the empty stream met his gaze.

And he neither hungered nor thirsted.

He had been swimming for miles when he saw the boat moored to a piling in the center of the stream. His many efforts to reach the banks had been blocked by some insidious current that swept him back each time he had attempted it. It was as if the stream had declared him prisoner, and there was no escape. He regretted the ignoring of the rowboat, but knew it was gone beyond the possibility of recall.

The craft, when he reached it, made him almost sing with happiness. Now he could surely find someone, for it was a motor boat of the latest design. He climbed in and sank gratefully on the soft cushions before he realized he was untired. There was no sense of the agony of exhaustion which should have made him gasp for breath. It was as if he had merely stepped into the craft and seated himself.

The motor sang him a song of power as he twisted the wheel, and he looked back at the wake that creamed behind him. Now, his troubles were over. The men who owned this boat should be somewhere along the stream.

But the miles wheeled behind him and only the blank walls of the jungle met his eyes.

And then the jungle was altering strangely. Where there had been massive trees were now smaller growths and the vines no longer covered them. The violent green had faded to a russet brown and the clearings became more frequent. In places he could see the sandy bank of the stream, but the water resisted all his efforts to land.

And still, there was no sign of life.

Time paced by on leaden feet as the motor roared its song of power. Then, subtly, the rhythm changed and it sputtered and at times almost stopped. He raised the cover and peered anxiously at the engine and was shocked at the accumulation of green rot that covered it. Slower and slower the boat ran, until it was barely creeping.

He was looking ahead when he saw the long slim shape that seemingly appeared from nowhere.

It was a boat, but like nothing he had ever seen before. Long, slim, and needle-shaped, it seemed the personification of power.

He was glad to leave the motorboat for his new transportation. As he stepped aboard he heard a gurgling behind him and a hasty glance showed his late craft settling to the bottom of the stream, swiftly disintegrating as it went.

It was some time before he could puzzle out the motive power of his new craft. The long transparent tube that ran completely through it was an unknown factor to him. More by accident than design he pressed the proper switch and felt the boat surge under him. Looking down he saw the torrent of water shoot through the tube and emerge from the stern in a welter of white foam that sent the boat spinning down the stream.

•He grabbed frantically at the steering lever and soon had the madly whirling thing under control.

Again the miles flowed by and ever the jungle thinned. The fog blanket remained the same, only a little less bright than it had been.

A closed canopy over the boat was welcome, as the heat was going and the air held a breath of chill.

The stream was widening now to the size of a river, but its current kept on in its steady pace. The banks were clear and their sands were dazzling in their whiteness. Once more he tried to land but all efforts were unavailing.

The rushing of the jet of water through the tube reminded him of molten silver and once more the deep sleep descended upon him.

While he slept the stream gained a small voice. Deep within it came something that was almost audible. An indistinct babbling as if uncounted voices bewailed the doom that came too suddenly.

The man awoke, and in waking, wondered. For the first time he seemed to realize the seeming ages that had passed since he had first found the stream, and he felt of his throat and the thirst which should be there and was not.

He pulled back the sheltering canopy and shivered in the chill breeze. Wonderingly he looked where the once luxurious jungle had stretched its green tangle, but only occasional remnants of low plants met his searching gaze. The land was dry and sere, but the stream grew wider as he watched.

His craft jerked oddly, and he glanced down at the tube. No longer was it a smooth even flow. There were bubbles and at times it was empty, then the flow would start again and for a few moments it would again be the silver ribbon which had lulled him to sleep.

Far ahead he saw a lot on the surface of the river and as he strained forward to see better, his craft slid quietly beneath the surface.

Again he started swimming.

The new boat was long, broad of beam and completely covered with a transparent dome. He couldn't give a name to the material of which it was built, as it was something he had never imagined, not even as a plastic. Even as he noticed there did not seem to be any way of opening the dome, a panel opened in the glassy side and a long, flat tongue of metal licked out from somewhere and stopped within easy reach.

Doubtful at first, he tested the firmness of the strange gangplank before crawling out of the water. There was no bending, it remained rock steady to his weight. Straightening up he took a few steps toward the boat. He glanced back, and almost yelled his terror. The clear stuff was disappearing behind him as he went.

Two bounds took him to the cabin, and he was fully inside before he had time to notice the interior.

It was more like a home than a boat. Soft divans lined the sides and several small tables were scattered around the floor. A rug, inches deep, was as transparent as the rest of it.

There was no sign of a motor, or steering lever, and he wondered where the strange craft got its motive power. The thought was still unfinished in his mind, when he felt the sudden impulse of power beneath him. A glance out a rear window showed a smooth wake making a perfect V in the stream.

It was a long time before he realized that the boat ran by the power of his thoughts. He amused himself for a time, running from side to side and in circles, but the resultant strain took more energy than he had. He tried to force the craft near the bank, but the attempt was useless. It was like all the others.

The idea of food idly crossed his mind and he wondered why he felt no

need of it. He thought of his former craving for thick steaks and baked potatoes, and jumped from his seat with a howl of fright.

Lying on a table in front of him was exactly what he had thought of. He reached out a cautious finger and touched the browned meat. It was sizzling hot!

He made an attempt to eat it, but couldn't force his throat to swallow, so he thought it out of existence and it disappeared obediently.

For the next few hours, or years, a varied assortment of things presented themselves for his approval, and were banished back into the nothingness from which they had come. It was only a game to the lonely passenger.

There was nothing left of the jungle now, as far as he could see. Just at the limit of his vision was what looked like a patch of snow, but he shrugged at that notion. No snow could ever fall in the tropics.

He sent a thought to one of the transparent panels which opened to the mental thrust, and shivered in the blast of chill air that came in on him.

The stream had widened until at times the ever present fog concealed the farther bank. And, the silence was absolute.

It was in that silence that he first became aware of the voice of the stream, and he leaned far out into the cold blast listening intently. It was a muted clangor that almost made sense. Several times he caught himself trying to answer the medley of voices, but each try seemed to make them more incoherent. It was as if every being on Earth was making their protest against the shortness of their minute of life. As the stream continued to widen, the sound grew in volume, until all the air was filled with the half-heard screamings.

The man staggered back to one of the soft divans and buried his ears deep in the cushiony surface, trying madly to shut out the demented chorus of the doomed. Unconsciousness came, almost as deep as death itself.

When he awoke, nothing had changed, except the uncanny mouthings that had so nearly driven him insane. They had subsided to a low surly muttering that seemed one with the stream.

The land, as far as he could see, was white with snow. Far in the distance he spied mighty domes and towers which were gone in the instant of their seeing, and only the bare plain was left. He rubbed his eyes and looked again, but nothing was there.

Dragging time started once more, and again the man found refuge in the powers of the wonderful boat. Many, varied, and weird were the productions of his fevered mind as his creations became more and more incredible.

The loneliness shut down like a trap, and he attempted the impossible.

The beings that came from the disordered brain showed no sign of the dignity of life; they were eerie, many-armed and legged creatures of nightmare. Each was sent back to the oblivion from whence they came, but still more were evoked.

And then, one of the forms refused to vanish at command, and swiftly putrefied.

The man sent frantic commands to the hitherto obedient panels, but they

remained closed, trapping the horrific stench. He tore at the openings, but they remained immovable.

He was babbling insanely when he finally forced the panel open, and the foul air gagged him as it swept past his head. He looked back at the table where the thing lay, but it was a mass of rotting something where gray froth formed and broke.

Thought after frantic thought he sent toward it, but only the tiny sound of a breaking bubble answered his command.

Then, for the first time he noticed the boat had stopped and was swinging idly in the slow current. His jumbled mind tried to form a clear command to the craft, but nothing happened.

He was weak and trembling when he managed to squirm from the opening he had made, and tumble in the stream. This time the water did not revive him as it had done before. Only the fact that the stream had shallowed kept his head above the surface. He gained a safe distance and looked back.

Again he saw the weird disintegration that had happened to all the craft he had found. He shook his head violently to cast out a thought which was burning his rapidly sobering brain, and turned once more to follow where ever the stream led. For deep in his mind he knew now that his fate was one with its waters.

And then, for the first time, he saw a curve in the straightness of the stream bed, and he swam as strongly as possible in his eagerness to discover what lay beyond his sight.

It was a graveyard of small craft that looked as if a band of children had been playing at the task of building boats. He went from one to the other trying to find something in which he could continue his journey, but it seemed hopeless to find one even capable of bearing his weight.

The cold wind bit through his sodden clothing and he shivered until his chattering teeth ached under the strain.

Finally he found what vaguely resembled a rowboat that seemed able to bear his weight, and climbed in, crouching low behind the scant gunwales to escape the wind. Too late he cursed himself for not attempting to wade to shore and make his way overland.

Again he slept, this time the deep sleep of exhaustion, and again the miles fled by.

The fog bank over the stream slowly darkened until everything was almost the same grayness. The current slowed until the boat barely crept.

The man awoke and strained his eyes to see, but the light was too dim for far vision. The banks now were covered with deep piled snow, and the air almost froze in his aching lungs.

And for the first time, he had the feeling of hunger and thirst. He scooped up handfuls of the water and sucked it noisily, but there was no taste of wetness about it.

He was half lying in his craft when far ahead down the now-straight stream bed he saw a rusty light that was just visible. He leaned forward,

squinting his eyes, and the motion was all that was needed to cause the collapse of the boat which spilled him back in the stream.

There was not enough left of the thing to make even an aid to floating, and he went forward, wading.

It was some time before he noticed the lessened resistance of the water. It was like walking through a thick fog, except that the stream was still as crystal clear as it had ever been.

Nearer and nearer the muddy red circle came, and he shouted with delight as he saw where the fog ended.

By the time he reached his goal, little remained of the stream, and just as he tottered from under the fog blanket, he saw all that was left of the waters sink slowly into the gray sands before him.

He was sobbing with relief when he raised his eyes, seeking for a sight of the sun which had been so long shut away from him.

Then screams tore his throat with steely fingers as he saw the dull red ball in the dusky heavens, and the burning thought he had so long denied, burst on his stunned brain.

The River Of Life had run its course.

The Water Ghost of Harrowby Hall

by John Kendrick Bangs

You may remember John Kendrick Bangs as the author of "The Houseboat on the Styx," an hilarious novel of a Spectral Club in Hades. Bangs was a very popular humorist of the turn-of-the-century, and quite prolific. Among his works are several collections of parody ghost stories designed to spoof the Gothic tales then still prevalent. Many of his tales now seem too slight for reprinting—such as the one about the toupee which turned white overnight when left in a haunted house!—but "The Water Ghost" is one that we think will still prove highly enjoyable, especially insofar as it shows what modern science can do confronted with medieval horror.



THE TROUBLE with Harrowby Hall was that it was haunted, and, what was worse, the ghost did not content itself with merely appearing at the bedside of the afflicted person who saw it, but persisted in remaining there for one mortal hour before it would disappear.

It never appeared except on Christmas Eve, and then as the clock was striking twelve, in which respect alone was it lacking in that originality which in these days is a *sine qua non* of success in spectral life. The owners of Harrowby Hall had done their utmost to rid themselves of the damp and dewy lady who rose up out of the best bedroom floor at midnight, but without avail. They had tried stopping the clock, so that the ghost would not know when it was midnight; but she made her appearance just the same, with that fearful miasmatic personality of hers, and there she would stand until everything about her was thoroughly saturated.

Then the owners of Harrowby Hall calked up every crack in the floor with the very best quality of hemp, and over this were placed layers of tar and canvas; the walls were made waterproof, and the doors and windows likewise, the proprietors having conceived the notion that the unexorcised lady would find it difficult to leak into the room after these precautions had been taken; but even this did not suffice. The following Christmas Eve she appeared as promptly as before, and frightened the occupant of the room quite out of his senses by sitting down alongside of him and gazing with her cavernous blue eyes into his; and he noticed, too, that in her long, aqueously

bony fingers bits of dripping seaweed were entwined, the ends hanging down, and these ends she drew across his forehead until he became like one insane. And then he swooned away, and was found unconscious in his bed the next morning by his host, simply saturated with sea-water and fright, from the combined effects of which he never recovered, dying four years later of pneumonia and nervous prostration at the age of seventy-eight.

The next year the master of Harrowby Hall decided not to have the best spare bedroom opened at all, thinking that perhaps the ghost's thirst for making herself disagreeable would be satisfied by haunting the furniture, but the plan was as unavailing as the many that had preceded it.

The ghost appeared as usual in the room—that is, it was supposed she did, for the hangings were dripping wet the next morning, and in the parlor below the haunted room a great damp spot appeared on the ceiling. Finding no one there, she immediately set out to learn the reason why, and she chose none other to haunt than the owner of the Harrowby himself. She found him in his own cosy room drinking whiskey—whiskey undiluted—and felicitating himself upon having foiled her ghostship, when all of a sudden the curl went out of his hair, his whiskey bottle filled and overflowed, and he was himself in a condition similar to that of a man who has fallen into a water-butt. When he recovered from the shock, which was a painful one, he saw before him the lady of the cavernous eyes and seaweed fingers. The sight was so unexpected and so terrifying that he fainted, but immediately came to, because of the vast amount of water in his hair, which, trickling down over his face, restored his consciousness.

Now it so happened that the master of Harrowby was a brave man, and while he was not particularly fond of interviewing ghosts, especially such quenching ghosts as the one before him, he was not to be daunted by an apparition. He had paid the lady the compliment of fainting from the effects of his first surprise, and now that he had come to he intended to find out a few things he felt he had a right to know. He would have liked to put on a dry suit of clothes first, but the apparition declined to leave him for an instant until her hour was up, and he was forced to deny himself that pleasure. Every time he would move she would follow him, with the result that everything she came in contact with got a ducking. In an effort to warm himself up he approached the fire, an unfortunate move as it turned out, because it brought the ghost directly over the fire, which immediately was extinguished. The whiskey became utterly valueless as a comforter to his chilled system, because it was by this time diluted to a proportion of ninety per cent. of water. The only thing he could do to ward off the evil effects of his encounter he did, and that was to swallow ten two-grain quinine pills, which he managed to put into his mouth before the ghost had time to interfere. Having done this, he turned with some asperity to the ghost, and said:

"Far be it from me to be impolite to a woman, madam, but I'm hanged if it wouldn't please me better if you'd stop these infernal visits of yours to this house. Go sit out on the lake, if you like that sort of thing; soak the water-butt, if you wish; but do not, I implore you, come into a gentleman's

house and saturate him and his possessions in this way. It is damned disagreeable."

"Henry Hartwick Oglethorpe," said the ghost, in a gurgling voice, "you don't know what you are talking about."

"Madam," returned the unhappy householder, "I wish that remark were strictly truthful. I was talking about you. It would be shillings and pence—nay, pounds, in my pocket, madam, if I did not know you."

"That is a bit of specious nonsense," returned the ghost, throwing a quart of indignation into the face of the master of Harrowby. "It may rank high as repartee, but as a comment upon my statement that you do not know what you are talking about, it savors of irrelevant impertinence. You do not know that I am compelled to haunt this place year after year by inexorable fate. It is no pleasure to me to enter this house, and ruin and mildew everything I touch. I never aspired to be a shower-bath, but it is my doom. Do you know who I am?"

"No, I don't," returned the master of Harrowby. "I should say you were the Lady of the Lake, or Little Sallie Waters."

"You are a witty man for your years," said the ghost.

"Well, my humor is drier than yours ever will be," returned the master.

"No doubt. I'm never dry. I am the Water Ghost of Harrowby Hall, and dryness is a quality entirely beyond my wildest hope. I have been the incumbent of this highly unpleasant office for two hundred years to-night."

"How the deuce did you ever come to get elected?" asked the master.

"Through a suicide," replied the specter. "I am the ghost of that fair maiden whose picture hangs over the mantelpiece in the drawing-room. I should have been your great-great-great-great-great-aunt if I had lived, Henry Hartwick Oglethorpe, for I was the own sister of your great-great-great-grandfather."

"But what induced you to get this house into such a predicament?"

"I was not to blame, sir," returned the lady. "It was my father's fault. He it was who built Harrowby Hall, and the haunted chamber was to have been mine. My father had it furnished in pink and yellow, knowing well that blue and gray formed the only combination of color I could tolerate. He did it merely to spite me, and, with what I deem a proper spirit, I declined to live in the room; whereupon my father said I could live there or on the lawn, he didn't care which. That night I ran from the house and jumped over the cliff into the sea."

"That was rash," said the master of Harrowby.

"So I've heard," returned the ghost. "If I had known what the consequences were to be I should not have jumped; but I really never realized what I was doing until after I was drowned. I had been drowned a week when a sea-nymph came to me and informed me that I was to be one of her followers forever afterwards, adding that it should be my doom to haunt Harrowby Hall for one hour every Christmas Eve throughout the rest of eternity. I was to haunt that room on such Christmas Eves as I found it inhabited; and if it

should turn out not to be inhabited, I was and am to spend the allotted hour with the head of the house."

"I'll sell the place."

"That you cannot do, for it is also required of me that I shall appear as the deeds are to be delivered to any purchaser, and divulge to him the awful secret of the house."

"Do you mean to tell me that on every Christmas Eve that I don't happen to have somebody in that guest-chamber, you are going to haunt me wherever I may be, ruining my whiskey, taking all the curl out of my hair, extinguishing my fire, and soaking me through to the skin?" demanded the master.

"You have stated the case, Oglethorpe. And what is more," said the water ghost, "it doesn't make the slightest difference where you are, if I find that room empty, wherever you may be I shall douse you with my spectral pres—"

Here the clock struck one, and immediately the apparition faded away. It was perhaps more of a trickle than a fade, but as a disappearance it was complete.

"By St. George and his Dragon!" ejaculated the master of Harrowby, wringing his hands. "It is guineas to hot-cross buns that next Christmas there's an occupant of the spare room, or I spend the night in a bathtub."

But the master of Harrowby would have lost his wager had there been anyone there to take him up, for when Christmas Eve came again he was in his grave, never having recovered from the cold contracted that awful night. Harrowby Hall was closed, and the heir to the estate was in London, where to him in his chambers came the same experience that his father had gone through, saving only that, being younger and stronger, he survived the shock. Everything in his rooms was ruined—his clocks were rusted in the works; a fine collection of water-color drawings was entirely obliterated by the onslaught of the water ghost; and what was worse, the apartments below his were drenched with the water soaking through the floors, a damage for which he was compelled to pay, and which resulted in his being requested by his landlady to vacate the premises immediately.

The story of the visitation inflicted upon his family had gone abroad, and no one could be got to invite him out to any function save afternoon teas and receptions. Fathers of daughters declined to permit him to remain in their houses later than eight o'clock at night, not knowing but that some emergency might arise in the supernatural world which would require the unexpected appearance of the water ghost in this on nights other than Christmas Eve, and before the mystic hour when weary churchyards, ignoring the rules which are supposed to govern polite society, begin to yawn. Nor would the maids themselves have aught to do with him, fearing the destruction by the sudden incursion of aqueous femininity of the costumes which they held most dear.

So the heir of Harrowby Hall resolved, as his ancestors for several generations before him had resolved, that something must be done. His first

thought was to make one of his servants occupy the haunted room at the crucial moment; but in this he failed, because the servants themselves knew the history of that room and rebelled. None of his friends would consent to sacrifice their personal comfort to his, nor was there to be found in all England a man so poor as to be willing to occupy the doomed chamber on Christmas Eve for pay.

Then the thought came to the heir to have the fireplace in the room enlarged, so that he might evaporate the ghost at its first appearance, and he was felicitating himself upon the ingenuity of his plan, when he remembered what his father had told him—how that no fire could withstand the lady's extremely contagious dampness. And then he bethought him of steam-pipes. These, he remembered, could lie hundreds of feet deep in water, and still retain sufficient heat to drive the water away in vapor; and as a result of this thought the haunted room was heated by steam to a withering degree, and the heir for six months attended daily the Turkish baths, so that when Christmas Eve came he could himself withstand the awful temperature of the room.

The scheme was only partially successful. The water ghost appeared at the specified time, and found the heir of Harrowby prepared; but hot as the room was, it shortened her visit by no more than five minutes in the hour, during which time the nervous system of the young master was well-nigh shattered, and the room itself was cracked and warped to an extent which required the outlay of a large sum of money to remedy. And worse than this, as the last drop of the water ghost was slowly sizzling itself out on the floor, she whispered to her would-be conqueror that his scheme would avail him nothing, because there was still water in great plenty where she came from, and that next year would find her rehabilitated and as exasperatingly saturating as ever.

It was then that the natural action of the mind, in going from one extreme to the other, suggested to the ingenious heir of Harrowby the means by which the water ghost was ultimately conquered, and happiness once more came within the grasp of the house of Oglethorpe.

The heir provided himself with a warm suit of fur underclothing. Donning this with the furry side in, he placed over it a rubber garment, tight-fitting, which he wore just as a woman wears a jersey. On top of this he placed another set of under-clothing, this suit made of wool, and over this was a second rubber garment like the first. Upon his head he placed a light and comfortable diving helmet, and so clad, on the following Christmas Eve he awaited the coming of his tormentor.

It was a bitterly cold night that brought to a close this twenty-fourth day of December. The air outside was still, but the temperature was below zero. Within all was quiet, the servants of Harrowby Hall awaiting with beating hearts the outcome of their master's campaign against his supernatural visitor.

The master himself was lying on the bed in the haunted room, clad as has already been indicated, and then——

The clock clanged out the hour of twelve.

There was a sudden banging of doors, a blast of cold air swept through

the halls, the door leading into the haunted chamber flew open, a splash was heard, and the water ghost was seen standing at the side of the heir of Harrowby, from whose outer dress there streamed rivulets of water, but whose own person deep down under the various garments he wore was as dry and as warm as he could have wished.

"Ha!" said the young master of Harrowby. "I'm glad to see you."

"You are the most original man I've met, if that is true," returned the ghost. "May I ask where did you get that hat?"

"Certainly, madam," returned the master, courteously. "It is a little portable observatory I had made for just such emergencies as this. But, tell me, is it true that you are doomed to follow me about for one mortal hour—to stand where I stand, to sit where I sit?"

"That is my delectable fate," returned the lady.

"We'll go out on the lake," said the master, starting up.

"You can't get rid of me that way," returned the ghost. "The water won't swallow me up; in fact, it will just add to my present bulk."

"Nevertheless," said the master, firmly, "we will go out on the lake."

"But, my dear sir," returned the ghost, with a pale reluctance, "it is fearfully cold out there. You will be frozen hard before you've been out ten minutes."

"Oh no, I'll not," replied the master. "I am very warmly dressed. Come!" This last in a tone of command that made the ghost ripple.

And they started.

They had not gone far before the water ghost showed signs of distress.

"You walk too slowly," she said. "I am nearly frozen. My knees are so stiff now I can hardly move. I beseech you to accelerate your step."

"I should like to oblige a lady," returned the master, courteously, "but my clothes are rather heavy, and a hundred yards an hour is about my speed. Indeed, I think we would better sit down here on this snowdrift, and talk matters over."

"Do not! Do not do so, I beg!" cried the ghost. "Let me move on. I feel myself growing rigid as it is. If we stop here, I shall be frozen stiff."

"That, madam," said the master slowly, and seating himself on an ice-cake—"that is why I have brought you here. We have been on this spot just ten minutes; we have fifty more. Take your time about it, madam, but freeze, that is all I ask of you."

"I cannot move my right leg now," cried the ghost, in despair, "and my overskirt is a solid sheet of ice. Oh, good, kind Mr. Oglethorpe, light a fire, and let me go free from these icy fetters."

"Never madam. It cannot be. I have you at last."

"Alas!" cried the ghost, a tear trickling down her frozen cheek. "Help me, I beg. I congeal!"

"Congeal, madam, congeal!" returned Oglethorpe, coldly. "You have drenched me and mine for two hundred and three years, madam. Tonight you have had your last drench."

"Ah, but I shall thaw out again, and then you'll see. Instead of the com-

fortably tepid, genial ghost I have been in my past, sir, I shall be iced-water," cried the lady, threateningly.

"No, you won't, either," returned Oglethorpe; "for when you are frozen quite stiff, I shall send you to a cold-storage warehouse, and there shall you remain an icy work of art forever more."

"But warehouses burn."

"So they do, but this warehouse cannot burn. It is made of asbestos and surrounding it are fireproof walls, and within those walls the temperature is now and shall forever be 416 degrees below the zero point; low enough to make an icicle of any flame in this world—or the next," the master added, with an ill-suppressed chuckle.

"For the last time let me beseech you. I would go on my knees to you, Oglethorpe, were they not already frozen. I beg of you do not doo——"

Here even the words froze on the water-ghost's lips and the clock struck one. There was a momentary tremor throughout the ice-bound form, and the moon, coming out from behind a cloud, shone down on the rigid figure of a beautiful woman sculptured in clear, transparent ice. There stood the ghost of Harrowby Hall, conquered by the cold, a prisoner for all time.

The heir of Harrowby had won at last, and today in a large storage house in London stands the frigid form of one who will never again flood the house of Oglethorpe with woe and sea-water.

As for the heir of Harrowby, his success in coping with a ghost has made him famous, a fame that still lingers about him, although his victory took place some twenty years ago; and so far from being unpopular with the fair sex, as he was when we first knew him, he has not only been married twice, but is to lead a third bride to the altar before the year is out.

The Hounds of Tindalos

by Frank Belknap Long

Frank Belknap Long was one of the original group of writers who gathered about the circle headed by the late H. P. Lovecraft and who drew their inspiration from him. Their stories of cosmic powers beyond those suspected by earthly savants were the special factor that made the early *Weird Tales* something quite unusual in the realm of magazines. Though *The Hounds of Tindalos* was not the young Long's first story, it was the story that came to be most often cited in reference to his mastery of the art of instilling ultramundane dread. It lent its title to the Arkham House collection of the author's works, and we are pleased to present it here for those who have not yet had the pleasure of experiencing its non-Euclidean suggestions.



"I'M GLAD you came," said Chalmers. He was sitting by the window and his face was very pale. Two tall candles guttered at his elbow and cast a sickly amber light over his long nose and slightly receding chin. Chalmers would have nothing modern about his apartment. He had the soul of a mediæval ascetic, and he preferred illuminated manuscripts to automobiles and leering stone gargoyles to radios and adding-machines.

As I crossed the room to the settee he had cleared for me I glanced at his desk and was surprized to discover that he had been studying the mathematical formulæ of a celebrated contemporary physicist, and that he had covered many sheets of thin yellow paper with curious geometric designs.

"Einstein and John Dee are strange bedfellows," I said as my gaze wandered from his mathematical charts to the sixty or seventy quaint books that comprised his strange little library. Plotinus and Emanuel Moscopulus, St. Thomas Aquinas and Frenicle de Bessy stood elbow to elbow in the somber ebony bookcase, and chairs, table and desk were littered with pamphlets about mediæval sorcery and witchcraft and black magic, and all of the valiant glamorous things that the modern world has repudiated.

Chalmers smiled engagingly, and passed me a Russian cigarette on a curiously carved tray. "We are just discovering now," he said, "that the old

alchemists and sorcerers were two-thirds *right*, and that your modern biologist and materialist is nine-tenths *wrong*."

"You have always scoffed at modern science," I said, a little impatiently.

"Only at scientific dogmatism," he replied. "I have always been a rebel, a champion of originality and lost causes; that is why I have chosen to repudiate the conclusions of contemporary biologists."

"And Einstein?" I asked.

"A priest of transcendental mathematics!" he murmured reverently. "A profound mystic and explorer of the great *suspected*."

"Then you do not entirely despise science."

"Of course not," he affirmed. "I merely distrust the scientific positivism of the past fifty years, the positivism of Haeckel and Darwin and of Mr. Bertrand Russell. I believe that biology has failed pitifully to explain the mystery of man's origin and destiny."

"Give them time," I retorted.

Chalmers' eyes glowed. "My friend," he murmured, "your pun is sublime. Give them *time*. That is precisely what I would do. But your modern biologist scoffs at time. He has the key but he refuses to use it. What do we know of time, really? Einstein believes that it is relative, that it can be interpreted in terms of space, of *curved* space. But must we stop there? When mathematics fails us can we not advance by—insight?"

"You are treading on dangerous ground," I replied. "That is a pitfall that your true investigator avoids. That is why modern science has advanced so slowly. It accepts nothing that it can not demonstrate. But you——"

"I would take hashish, opium, all manner of drugs. I would emulate the sages of the East. And then perhaps I would apprehend——"

"What?"

"The fourth dimension."

Theosophical rubbish!"

"Perhaps. But I believe that drugs expand human consciousness. William James agreed with me. And I have discovered a new one."

"A new drug?"

"It was used centuries ago by Chinese alchemists, but it is virtually unknown in the West. Its occult properties are amazing. With its aid and the aid of my mathematical knowledge I believe that I can *go back through time*."

"I do not understand."

"Time is merely our imperfect perception of a new dimension of space. Time and motion are both illusions. Everything that has existed from the beginning of the world *exists now*. Events that occurred centuries ago on this planet continue to exist in another dimension of space. Events that will occur centuries from now *exist already*. We can not perceive their existence because we can not enter the dimension of space that contains them. Human beings as we know them are merely fractions, infinitesimally small fractions of one enormous whole. Every human being is linked with *all* the life that has preceded him on this planet. All of his ancestors are parts of him. Only

time separates him from his forebears, and time is an illusion and does not exist."

"I think I understand," I murmured.

"It will be sufficient for my purpose if you can form a vague idea of what I wish to achieve. I wish to strip from my eyes the veils of illusion that time has thrown over them, and see the *beginning and the end*."

"And you think this new drug will help you?"

"I am sure that it will. And I want you to help me. I intend to take the drug immediately. I can not wait. I must *see*." His eyes glittered strangely. "I am going back, back through time."

He rose and strode to the mantel. When he faced me again he was holding a small square box in the palm of his hand. "I have here five pellets of the drug Liao. It was used by the Chinese philosopher Lao Tze, and while under its influence he visioned Tao. Tao is the most mysterious force in the world; it surrounds and pervades all things; it contains the visible universe and everything that we call reality. He who apprehends the mysteries of Tao sees clearly all that was and will be."

"Rubbish!" I retorted.

"Tao resembles a great animal, recumbent, motionless, containing in its enormous body all the worlds of our universe, the past, the present and the future. We see portions of this great monster through a slit, which we call time. With the aid of this drug I shall enlarge the slit. I shall behold the great figure of life, the great recumbent beast in its entirety."

"And what do you wish me to do?"

"Watch, my friend. Watch and take notes. And if I go back too far you must recall me to reality. You can recall me by shaking me violently. If I appear to be suffering acute physical pain you must recall me at once."

"Chalmers," I said, "I wish you wouldn't make this experiment. You are taking dreadful risks. I don't believe that there is any fourth dimension and I emphatically do not believe in Tao. And I don't approve of your experimenting with unknown drugs."

"I know the properties of this drug," he replied. "I know precisely how it affects the human animal and I know its dangers. The risk does not reside in the drug itself. My only fear is that I may become lost in time. You see, I shall assist the drug. Before I swallow this pellet I shall give my undivided attention to the geometric and algebraic symbols that I have traced on this paper." He raised the mathematical chart that rested on his knee. "I shall prepare my mind for an excursion into time. I shall *approach* the fourth dimension with my conscious mind before I take the drug which will enable me to exercise occult powers of perception. Before I enter the dream world of the Eastern mystics I shall acquire all of the mathematical help that modern science can offer. This mathematical knowledge, this conscious approach to an actual apprehension of the fourth dimension of time will supplement the work of the drug. The drug will open up stupendous new vistas—the mathematical preparation will enable me to grasp them intellectually.

I have often grasped the fourth dimension in dreams, emotionally, intuitively, but I have never been able to recall, in waking life, the occult splendors that were momentarily revealed to me.

"But with your aid, I believe that I can recall them. You will take down everything that I say while I am under the influence of the drug. No matter how strange or incoherent my speech may become you will omit nothing. When I awake I may be able to supply the key to whatever is mysterious or incredible. I am not sure that I shall succeed, but if I *do* succeed"—his eyes were strangely luminous—"*time will exist for me no longer!*"

He sat down abruptly. "I shall make the experiment at once. Please stand over there by the window and watch. Have you a fountain pen?"

I nodded gloomily and removed a pale green Waterman from my upper vest pocket.

"And a pad, Frank?"

I groaned and produced a memorandum book. "I emphatically disapprove of this experiment," I muttered. "You're taking a frightful risk."

"Don't be an asinine old woman!" he admonished. "Nothing that you can say will induce me to stop now. I entreat you to remain silent while I study these charts."

He raised the charts and studied them intently. I watched the clock on the mantel as it ticked out the seconds, and a curious dread clutched at my heart so that I choked.

Suddenly the clock stopped ticking, and exactly at that moment Chalmers swallowed the drug.

I rose quickly and moved toward him, but his eyes implored me not to interfere. "The clock has stopped," he murmured. "The forces that control it approve of my experiment. *Time* stopped, and I swallowed the drug. I pray God that I shall not lose my way."

He closed his eyes and leaned back on the sofa. All of the blood had left his face and he was breathing heavily. It was clear that the drug was acting with extraordinary rapidity.

"It is beginning to get dark," he murmured. "Write that. It is beginning to get dark and the familiar objects in the room are fading out. I can discern them vaguely through my eyelids but they are fading swiftly."

I shook my pen to make the ink come and wrote rapidly in shorthand as he continued to dictate.

"I am leaving the room. The walls are vanishing and I can no longer see any of the familiar objects. Your face, though, is still visible to me. I hope that you are writing. I think that I am about to make a great leap—a leap through space. Or perhaps it is through time that I shall make the leap. I can not tell. Everything is dark, indistinct."

He sat for a while silent, with his head sunk upon his breast. Then suddenly he stiffened and his eyelids fluttered open. "God in heaven!" he cried. "I *see!*"

He was straining forward in his chair, staring at the opposite wall. But I knew that he was looking beyond the wall and that the objects in the room no longer existed for him. "Chalmers," I cried, "Chalmers, shall I wake you?"

"Do not!" he shrieked. "I see *everything*. All of the billions of lives that preceded me on this planet are before me at this moment. I see men of all races, all colors. They are fighting, killing, building, dancing, singing. They are sitting about rude fires on lonely gray deserts, and flying through the air in monoplanes. They are riding the seas in bark canoes and enormous steamships; they are painting bison and mammoths on the walls of dismal caves and covering huge canvases with queer futuristic designs. I watch the migrations from Atlantis. I watch the migrations from Lemuria. I see the elder races—a strange horde of black dwarfs overwhelming Asia and the Neanderthals with lowered heads and bent knees ranging obscenely across Europe. I watch the Achæans streaming into the Greek islands, and the crude beginnings of Hellenic culture. I am in Athens and Pericles is young. I am standing on the soil of Italy. I assist in the rape of the Sabines; I march with the Imperial Legions. I tremble with awe and wonder as the enormous standards go by and the ground shakes with the tread of the victorious *bastati*. A thousand naked slaves grovel before me as I pass in a litter of gold and ivory drawn by night-black oxen from Thebes, and the flower-girls scream '*Ave Cæsar*' as I nod and smile. I am myself a slave on a Moorish galley. I watch the erection of a great cathedral. Stone by stone it rises, and through months and years I stand and watch each stone as it falls into place. I am burned on a cross head downward in the thyme-scented gardens of Nero, and I watch with amusement and scorn the torturers at work in the chambers of the Inquisition.

"I walk in the holiest sanctuaries; I enter the temples of Venus. I kneel in adoration before the Magna Mater, and I throw coins on the bare knees of the sacred courtezans who sit with veiled faces in the groves of Babylon. I creep into an Elizabethan theater and with the stinking rabble about me I applaud *The Merchant of Venice*. I walk with Dante through the narrow streets of Florence. I meet the young Beatrice and the hem of her garment brushes my sandals as I stare enraptured. I am a priest of Isis, and my magic astounds the nations. Simon Magus kneels before me, imploring my assistance, and Pharaoh trembles when I approach. In India I talk with the Masters and run screaming from their presence, for their revelations are as salt on wounds that bleed.

"I perceive everything *simultaneously*. I perceive everything from all sides; I am a part of all the teeming billions about me. I exist in all men and all men exist in me. I perceive the whole of human history in a single instant, the past and the present.

"By simply *straining* I can see farther and farther back. Now I am going back through strange curves and angles. Angles and curves multiply about me. I perceive great segments of time through *curves*. There is *curved time*,

and *angular time*. The beings that exist in angular time can not enter curved time. It is very strange.

"I am going back and back. Man has disappeared from the earth. Gigantic reptiles crouch beneath enormous palms and swim through the loathly black waters of dismal lakes. Now the reptiles have disappeared. No animals remain upon the land, but beneath the waters, plainly visible to me, dark forms move slowly over the rotting vegetation.

"The forms are becoming simpler and simpler. Now they are single cells. All about me there are angles—strange angles that have no counterparts on the earth. I am desperately afraid.

"There is an abyss of being which man has never fathomed."

I stared. Chalmers had risen to his feet and he was gesticulating helplessly with his arms. "I am passing through *unearthly* angles; I am approaching—oh, the burning horror of it!"

"Chalmers!" I cried. "Do you wish me to interfere?"

He brought his right hand quickly before his face, as though to shut out a vision unspeakable. "Not yet!" he cried; "I will go on. I will see—what—lies—beyond—"

A cold sweat streamed from his forehead and his shoulders jerked spasmodically. "Beyond life there are"—his face grew ashen with terror—"things that I can not distinguish. They move slowly through angles. They have no bodies, and they move slowly through outrageous angles."

It was then that I became aware of the odor in the room. It was a pungent, indescribable odor, so nauseous that I could scarcely endure it. I stepped quickly to the window and threw it open. When I returned to Chalmers and looked into his eyes I nearly fainted.

"I think they have scented me!" he shrieked. "They are slowly turning toward me."

He was trembling horribly. For a moment he clawed at the air with his hands. Then his legs gave way beneath him and he fell forward on his face, slobbering and moaning.

I watched him in silence as he dragged himself across the floor. He was no longer a man. His teeth were bared and saliva dripped from the corners of his mouth.

"Chalmers," I cried. "Chalmers, stop it! Stop it, do you hear?"

As if in reply to my appeal he commenced to utter hoarse convulsive sounds which resembled nothing so much as the barking of a dog, and began a sort of hideous writhing in a circle about the room. I bent and seized him by the shoulders. Violently, desperately, I shook him. He turned his head and snapped at my wrist. I was sick with horror, but I dared not release him for fear that he would destroy himself in a paroxysm of rage.

"Chalmers," I muttered, "you must stop that. There is nothing in this room that can harm you. Do you understand?"

I continued to shake and admonish him, and gradually the madness died

out of his face. Shivering convulsively, he crumpled into a grotesque heap on the Chinese rug.

I carried him to the sofa and deposited him upon it. His features were twisted in pain, and I knew that he was still struggling dumbly to escape from abominable memories.

"Whisky," he muttered. "You'll find a flask in the cabinet by the window—upper left-hand drawer."

When I handed him the flask his fingers tightened about it until the knuckles showed blue. "They nearly got me," he gasped. He drained the stimulant in immoderate gulps, and gradually the color crept back into his face.

"That drug was the very devil!" I murmured.

"It wasn't the drug," he moaned.

His eyes no longer glared insanely, but he still wore the look of a lost soul.

"They scented me in time," he moaned. "I went too far."

"What were *they* like?" I said, to humor him.

He leaned forward and gripped my arm. He was shivering horribly. "No word in our language can describe them!" He spoke in a hoarse whisper. "They are symbolized vaguely in the myth of the Fall, and in an obscene form which is occasionally found engraven on ancient tablets. The Greeks had a name for them, which veiled their essential foulness. The tree, the snake and the apple—these are the vague symbols of a most awful mystery."

His voice had risen to a scream. "Frank, Frank, a terrible and unspeakable deed was done in the beginning. Before time, the deed, and from the deed——"

He had risen and was hysterically pacing the room. "The seeds of the deed move through angles in dim recesses of time. They are hungry and athirst!"

"Chalmers," I pleaded to quiet him. "We are living in the third decade of the Twentieth Century."

"They are lean and athirst!" he shrieked. "*The Hounds of Tindalos!*"

"Chalmers, shall I phone for a physician?"

"A physician can not help me now. They are horrors of the soul, and yet"—he hid his face in his hands and groaned—"they are real, Frank. I saw them for a ghastly moment. For a moment I stood on the *other side*. I stood on the pale gray shores beyond time and space. In an awful light that was not light, in a silence that shrieked, I saw *them*."

"All the evil in the universe was concentrated in their lean, hungry bodies. Or had they bodies? I saw them only for a moment; I can not be certain. *But I heard them breathe*. Indescribably for a moment I felt their breath upon my face. They turned toward me and I fled screaming. In a single moment I fled screaming through time. I fled down quintillions of years.

"But they scented me. Men awake in them cosmic hungers. We have escaped, momentarily, from the foulness that rings them round. They thirst

for that in us which is clean, which emerged from the deed without stain. There is a part of us which did not partake in the deed, and that they hate. But do not imagine that they are literally, prosaically evil. They are beyond good and evil as we know it. They are that which in the beginning fell away from cleanliness. Through the deed they became bodies of death, receptacles of all foulness. But they are not evil in *our* sense because in the spheres through which they move there is no thought, no morals, no right or wrong as we understand it. There is merely the pure and the foul. The foul expresses itself through angles; the pure through curves. Man, the pure part of him, is descended from a curve. Do not laugh. I mean that literally."

I rose and searched for my hat. "I'm dreadfully sorry for you, Chalmers," I said, as I walked toward the door. "But I don't intend to stay and listen to such gibberish. I'll send my physician to see you. He's an elderly, kindly chap and he won't be offended if you tell him to go to the devil. But I hope you'll respect his advice. A week's rest in a good sanitarium should benefit you immeasurably."

I heard him laughing as I descended the stairs, but his laughter was so utterly mirthless that it moved me to tears.

2

When Chalmers phoned the following morning my first impulse was to hang up the receiver immediately. His request was so unusual and his voice was so wildly hysterical that I feared any further association with him would result in the impairment of my own sanity. But I could not doubt the genuineness of his misery, and when he broke down completely and I heard him sobbing over the wire I decided to comply with his request.

"Very well," I said. "I will come over immediately and bring the plaster."

En route to Chalmers' home I stopped at a hardware store and purchased twenty pounds of plaster of Paris. When I entered my friend's room he was crouching by the window watching the opposite wall out of eyes that were feverish with fright. When he saw me he rose and seized the parcel containing the plaster with an avidity that amazed and horrified me. He had extruded all of the furniture and the room presented a desolate appearance.

"It is just conceivable that we can thwart them!" he exclaimed. "But we must work rapidly. Frank, there is a stepladder in the hall. Bring it here immediately. And then fetch a pail of water."

"What for?" I murmured.

He turned sharply and there was a flush on his face. "To mix the plaster, you fool!" he cried. "To mix the plaster that will save our bodies and souls from a contamination unmentionable. To mix the plaster that will save the world from—Frank, *they must be kept out!*"

"Who?" I murmured.

"The Hounds of Tindalos!" he muttered. "They can only reach us through angles. We must eliminate all angles from this room. I shall plaster up all

of the corners, all of the crevices. We must make this room resemble the interior of a sphere."

I knew that it would have been useless to argue with him. I fetched the stepladder, Chalmers mixed the plaster, and for three hours we labored. We filled in the four corners of the wall and the intersections of the floor and wall and the wall and ceiling, and we rounded the sharp angles of the window-seat.

"I shall remain in this room until they return in time," he affirmed when our task was completed. "When they discover that the scent leads through curves they will return. They will return ravenous and snarling and unsatisfied to the foulness that was in the beginning, before time, beyond space."

He nodded graciously and lit a cigarette. "It was good of you to help," he said.

"Will you not see a physician, Chalmers?" I pleaded.

"Perhaps—tomorrow," he murmured. "But now I must watch and wait."

"Wait for what?" I urged.

Chalmers smiled wanly. "I know that you think me insane," he said. "You have a shrewd but prosaic mind, and you can not conceive of an entity that does not depend for its existence on force and matter. But did it ever occur to you, my friend, that force and matter are merely the barriers to perception imposed by time and space? When one knows, as I do, that time and space are identical and that they are both deceptive because they are merely imperfect manifestations of a higher reality, one no longer seeks in the visible world for an explanation of the mystery and terror of being."

I rose and walked toward the door.

"Forgive me," he cried. "I did not mean to offend you. You have a superlative intellect, but I—I have a *superhuman* one. It is only natural that I should be aware of your limitations."

"Phone if you need me," I said, and descended the stairs two steps at a time. "I'll send my physician over at once," I muttered, to myself. "He's a hopeless maniac, and heaven knows what will happen if someone doesn't take charge of him immediately."

3

The following is a condensation of two announcements which appeared in the Partridgeville Gazette for July 3, 1928:

Earthquake Shakes Financial District

At 2 o'clock this morning an earth tremor of unusual severity broke several plate-glass windows in Central Square and completely disorganized the electric and street railway systems. The tremor was felt in the outlying districts and the steeple of the First Baptist Church on Angell Hill (de-

signed by Christopher Wren in 1717) was entirely demolished. Firemen are now attempting to put out a blaze which threatens to destroy the Partridgeville Glue Works. An investigation is promised by the mayor and an immediate attempt will be made to fix responsibility for this disastrous occurrence.

OCCULT WRITER MURDERED BY UNKNOWN GUEST

Horrible Crime in Central Square

Mystery Surrounds Death of Halpin Chalmers

At 9 a.m. today the body of Halpin Chalmers, author and journalist, was found in an empty room above the jewelry store of Smithwick and Isaacs, 24 Central Square. The coroner's investigation revealed that the room had been rented *furnished* to Mr. Chalmers on May 1, and that he had himself disposed of the furniture a fortnight ago. Chalmers was the author of several recondite books on occult themes, and a member of the Bibliographic Guild. He formerly resided in Brooklyn, New York.

At 7 a.m. Mr. L. E. Hancock, who occupies the apartment opposite Chalmers' room in the Smithwick and Isaacs establishment, smelt a peculiar odor when he opened his door to take in his cat and the morning edition of the *Partridgeville Gazette*. The odor he describes as extremely acrid and nauseous, and he affirms that it was so strong in the vicinity of Chalmers' room that he was obliged to hold his nose when he approached that section of the hall.

He was about to return to his own apartment when it occurred to him that Chalmers might have accidentally forgotten to turn off the gas in his kitchenette. Becoming considerably alarmed at the thought, he decided to investigate, and when repeated tappings on Chalmers' door brought no response he notified the superintendent. The latter opened the door by means of a pass key, and the two men quickly made their way into Chalmers' room. The room was utterly destitute of furniture, and Hancock asserts that when he first glanced at the floor his heart went cold within him, and that the superintendent, without saying a word, walked to the open window and stared at the building opposite for fully five minutes.

Chalmers lay stretched upon his back in the center of the room. He was starkly nude, and his chest and arms were covered with a peculiar bluish pus or ichor. His head lay grotesquely upon his chest. It had been completely severed from his body, and the features were twisted and torn and horribly mangled. Nowhere was there a trace of blood.

The room presented a most astonishing appearance. The intersections of the walls, ceiling and floor had been thickly smeared with plaster of Paris, but at intervals fragments had cracked and fallen off, and someone had

grouped these upon the floor about the murdered man so as to form a perfect triangle.

Beside the body were several sheets of charred yellow paper. These bore fantastic geometric designs and symbols and several hastily scrawled sentences. The sentences were almost illegible and so absurd in context that they furnished no possible clue to the perpetrator of the crime. "I am waiting and watching," Chalmers wrote. "I sit by the window and watch walls and ceiling. I do not believe they can reach me, but I must beware of the Doels. Perhaps *they* can help them break through. The satyrs will help, and they can advance through the scarlet circles. The Greeks knew a way of preventing that. It is a great pity that we have forgotten so much."

On another sheet of paper, the most badly charred of the seven or eight fragments found by Detective Sergeant Douglas (of the Partridgeville Reserve), was scrawled the following:

"Good God, the plaster is falling! A terrific shock has loosened the plaster and it is falling. An earthquake perhaps! I never could have anticipated this. It is growing dark in the room. I must phone Frank. But can he get here in time? I will try. I will recite the Einstein formula. I will—God, they are breaking through! They are breaking through! Smoke is pouring from the corners of the wall. Their *tongues*—ahhhhh—"

In the opinion of Detective Sergeant Douglas, Chalmers was poisoned by some obscure chemical. He has sent specimens of the strange blue slime found on Chalmers' body to the Partridgeville Chemical Laboratories; and he expects the report will shed new light on one of the most mysterious crimes of recent years. That Chalmers entertained a guest on the evening preceding the earthquake is certain, for his neighbor distinctly heard a low murmur of conversation in the former's room as he passed it on his way to the stairs. Suspicion points strongly to this unknown visitor and the police are diligently endeavoring to discover his identity.

4

Report of James Morton, chemist and bacteriologist:
My dear Mr. Douglas:

The fluid sent to me for analysis is the most peculiar that I have ever examined. It resembles living protoplasm, but it lacks the peculiar substances known as enzymes. Enzymes catalyze the chemical reactions occurring in living cells, and when the cell dies they cause it to disintegrate by hydrolyzation. Without enzymes protoplasm should possess enduring vitality, i. e., immortality. Enzymes are the negative components, so to speak, of unicellular organism, which is the basis of all life. That living matter can exist without enzymes biologists emphatically deny. And yet the substance that you have sent me is alive and it lacks these "indispensable" bodies. Good God, sir, do you realize what astounding new vistas this opens up?

Excerpt from The Secret Watchers by the late Halpin Chalmers:

What if, parallel to the life we know, there is another life that does not die, which lacks the elements that destroy *our* life? Perhaps in another dimension there is a *different* force from that which generates our life. Perhaps this force emits energy, or something similar to energy, which passes from the unknown dimension where *it* is and creates a new form of cell life in our dimension. No one knows that such new cell life does exist in our dimension. Ah, but I have seen *its* manifestations. I have *talked* with them. In my room at night I have talked with the Doels. And in dreams I have seen their maker. I have stood on the dim shore beyond time and matter and seen *it*. *It* moves through strange curves and outrageous angles. Some day I shall travel in time and meet *it* face to face.

The Picture

By Francis Flagg

We are all familiar with the Faust theme—the story of a man who makes a pact with the devil at the price of his soul, and usually gets a fiendish legalistic double-cross besides. Here is the story of a man who made a pact, though not with the devil, with Something Else. There was also a price, a price that encompassed one of the two great driving forces of life. In drawing his unusual and vivid tale of a hobo they called "Crazy Jim," Francis Flagg has also drawn a lesson in human motives.



THE ROOM was in complete darkness. "O Liam Maroo," chanted the man. The blackness was like a thick velvet against his face. He spoke the words that for twenty thousand years no human voice had uttered. Far off, in an infinity of night, grew a red spot, lurid, uncanny to behold. The man shuddered. Almost he dashed to pieces the fragile contrivance that for three weeks, night after night, in this miserable room, he had brought to completion. But his will conquered. In a voice almost inaudible he said the seven necessary words and made the seven unspeakable motions. The red spot grew, expanded. In the center of the red spot formed a face, a terrible face, an *unhuman* face, the face of Liam Maroo, the World Ancient. "I am here," said the face.

The man fought the faintness that threatened to engulf his senses. "O Liam Maroo," he whispered, "the deed has been done, the altar raised. For seven nights I have conjured you by the seven necessary words, and the seven unspeakable motions. Speak, have I not fulfilled the ancient bargain?"

"You have fulfilled," said the face.

"Then by the Book of Him Who First Conjured, I call upon you to fulfill yours."

"It is well," said the face. "What is your wish?"

"Power," answered the man. "Power. I who have been weak, would be strong. I who have been poor and lowly, would be high and mighty. I who have known the contempt of men, would know their envy and servility. I who have known poverty and hunger, would know riches and plenty. Give me power."

His voice at last rang like a trumpet, growing stronger with every word

uttered, and he leaned forward in his eagerness until in front of him the invisible contrivance creaked and swayed.

"Power," said the face thoughtfully. "Would it not be better to do as Suliman, and ask nothing but wisdom?"

"Nay," said the man. "Suliman was already a king, and rich. Wisdom added to power and riches made him greater. But without power even Wisdom can die in the gutter."

"True," said the face; "and by the choice you make you prove yourself already wise. You would have power, power to sway men, power to create and hold riches. It is well. Such power is yours, such power I endow you with—but at a price."

"My soul?" said the man. "It is yours; take it."

"Soul!" echoed the face. "Whom do you take me for—Mephistopheles? Only the Antagonist could barter for your soul. To me it is worthless. Not your soul."

"Not my soul," echoed the man. "Then name what you will."

The unhuman face of Liam Maroo regarded the man intently. "Power, riches, the magnetism that sways men, all these I give you, and in return you shall pay to me the woman you love."

"The woman I love! But I love no woman," said the man.

"You will," said the face. "If you accept my offer you are fated to meet her. This, then, is the price I ask, that at the time I choose you shall sacrifice to me her brain, and her heart, and——"

The man listened to the last horrid detail of the sacrificial rite and shuddered. In the deep darkness his cheeks blanched, and for a moment he hesitated. But the overwhelming ambition that had driven him to master the secret of the Book of Him Who First Conjured, that had nerved him, in spite of superstitious fears, to raise the altar, practise the awful and uncanny ritual, would not now let him retreat. What! to forego his heart's desire for a woman he did not as yet know and for whom he cared nothing? "I accept," he said hoarsely. "The woman is yours."

Was it pity that flitted across the remote, unhuman countenance of Liam Maroo?

"Think well," said the face warningly.

"I have thought," said the man.

"Let the pact be signed," said the face.

Then followed a ceremony that can never be described in words. The red spot grew until it filled the room with its lurid glow. The troglodytes came, and the three things of which Radge Oep speaks in that book which no one now understands. The man was bound with the serpents, one of which knew Eve. He was scourged with seven whips fashioned of scorpions. Then came The Horns and pierced him in a secret spot. After that . . .

But it is well to be silent. In time the red light went as it had come. The room was dark. Dawn came, and the sun shone over the roof-tops and through the single window of the room and revealed its squalid meagerness. There was nothing to see, save a soap-box on end, even pieces of shaving,

a chalked diagram on the floor, and the body of a man lying heavy in sleep across a sagging bed.

2

The rise of Jim James to wealth and power was phenomenal, even for that traditional land of opportunity and of startling financial successes, America. Carnegie rose from poor boy to steel magnate; Rockefeller from obscure clerk to millionaire oil baron; Henry Ford developed the cheap automobile industry and became one of the uncrowned kings of business. But sensational as were the financial successes of these men there was nothing mysterious about them. One could follow the process of their emergence from comparative poverty to money masters, over a period of years. But at thirty-five Jim James was working as a dishwasher in the kitchen of O Come Inn restaurant on Congress Avenue, Tucson, Arizona, for twelve dollars a week. This was in the spring of 1930. He was then a thin-faced, slender, dried-up wisp of a man weighing no more than a hundred and twenty pounds. His chin habitually showed a stubble of dirty-black beard and he went clad in a shapeless pair of trousers, frayed at the bottoms, and in a khaki shirt, shiny on the bosom and far from clean. Before that he had been a tramp, a bindlestiff, a laborer in the oil fields, an insignificant migratory worker whom people spoke of—if they ever spoke of him at all—as slightly cracked. He was queer, in those days something of a butt. He never resented an insult, a sneer. He went his way, silent, almost furtive. Only his eyes showed any force, any vitality; but as he never looked anyone directly in the face, few noticed them. With him he always carried a book. It was the same book; an odd yellow-looking volume he had picked up God knows where. Always, in camps, in jungles, by the side of the roads, he was reading in this book. When he thought himself alone he would singsong certain unintelligible sentences in an alien gibberish. Also he would build strange little contrivances of sticks and stones and draw diagrams in the dust. Naturally this aroused the curiosity of his fellow hoboes. Several times men took the volume away from him and examined it, only to find the printing fine and in unintelligible characters, with weird drawings and designs on alternate pages that suggested nothing to them save that he who could be interested in such truck must be daffy. So they threw the book back to him with good-natured oaths and gibes. Seemingly, Jim James never resented these outrages. He surrendered the book without struggle, received it back with no audible comment, and in time men ceased bothering him. So much of his life is authentic. But before that, who he was, where he came from, is shrouded in mystery. Then came the spring of 1930, the dish-washing job, and the first of the mysterious happenings which in a few weeks was to lift this vagabond, this insignificant menial and reputed daft person out of poverty and squalor and make him one of the most envied and talked-of persons in America, in time of the world.

He was late for work that morning. Usually he was at the dishpan by seven. But it was nine when he came through the café door. Matt Dowden, the stout, big-stomached proprietor, intended to bawl him out. But the irate

words died in his throat. Even Matt Dowden could see that there was some magical change in his erstwhile dish-washer. For the first time he experienced the sensation of having Jim James look at him levelly with those strange vital eyes of his.

"I'm quitting the job, Matt," he said in soft, easy tones.

This was another surprise. Jim James had seldom spoken, but when he did he had addressed his employer haltingly, and always as "sir" or "mister." If the dog lying at the door had raised up and bellowed, "Hello, Matt," Matt Dowden couldn't have been more thunderstruck.

"You see," said Jim James conversationally, "I've struck it rich. Yes, gold. Up the street a ways. I'm on my way now to file my claim at the courthouse. What do you think of that for a nugget, Matt?"

He threw on the counter a dull glittering mass the size of a large cobblestone. Matt Dowden could scarcely believe his eyes. He picked it up. The thing was surprisingly heavy.

"Keep it," said Jim James indifferently and walked out.

By noon everyone in Tucson knew that Jim James had discovered and filed on a gold mine in a downtown lot back of his lodging-house. At first there was nothing but laughter. Who ever heard of gold in the heart of town? Undoubtedly the man was crazy. But when he began to flood the local assay offices with fabulously rich nuggets, with canvas bags of almost pure gold-dust, opinion changed. In a few days one of the big mining companies had its men on the claim making tests, analyzing the soil, judging the richness of the find. Their reports were breath-taking. The mine was a regular bonanza, incredibly rich. There were millions in it—millions! The newspapers ran screaming headlines:

"GOLD STRIKE IN TUCSON!"

Business men forgot their business. A rush was made to file on any and everything. From all over the West foot-loose adventurers stampeded into Tucson in one of the most remarkable gold-rushes in history. The big mining company made a cash offer of two hundred thousand dollars to Jim James. Jim James said he wasn't interested. They made it a million. He laughed. "Two million," he said, "not a cent less." So inside of two weeks they bought him out, and the erstwhile bum and dish-washer was now twice a millionaire.

But no sooner was the mine sold than a strange thing happened. Gold ceased to be found on the fabulously rich claim. True, mining engineers had sunk their shafts twenty feet into the soil, through sand and quartz almost solid gold. They had assayed this gold at staggering figures to the ton. But the day after the deal was consummated with Jim James the mine proved to contain nothing but worthless sand and rock. The gold had vanished. The experts could hardly believe their senses. A cry was raised that Jim James had deliberately salted the claim, that he defrauded the mining company out of its purchase price. But there were reports of the chemists and engineers

to disprove such charges. How could a poor dish-washer salt a claim for twenty feet into the earth? The gold taken from the claim and still existent ran into the hundreds of thousands of dollars. No, there had been gold in the claim, a small fortune in gold, but the mining experts had overestimated its extent and the lead had petered out. This became the consensus. The mining company finally pocketed its loss, the gold-seekers left town, the business men returned to their businesses. Only the newspapers were heralding the appearance, on the financial stage of the country, of the unique and even mysterious figure of one, Jim James, ex-dishwasher and migratory worker.

3

The startling change in the fortunes of Jim James was no more startling than the change in the man himself. Even during the two weeks of the gold rush people noticed this sudden metamorphosis in the insignificant dish-washer. He did not, of course, grow in height, but the straightening of his stooped shoulders, the erect way in which he now carried himself, gave the impression of increased stature. He was almost as self-contained, as silent as ever, but from him exuded a force, a dynamic strength, that was a revelation to those who had known him previously. "It is incredible," muttered Matt Dowden, "incredible!"

When Jim James had need to speak he spoke softly, without hesitation, his dark eyes fixed unswervingly on those of the people with whom he spoke. When addressing persons in front of him he gave the uncanny impression of looking directly into the face of each individual at one and the same moment. Yet he made no attempt to change his manner of living, wore the same shapeless trousers and greasy shirt. There were men who had met him on the road, shifty-eyed yeggs and gay-cats who, remembering him as he had been, thought they would blow into town and relieve the old fool of the proceeds of his lucky strike. But they departed after a few days, thoroughly mystified and no richer than when they had come. One or two old-timers he staked with a few dollars. A Mexican who had fed him from time to time was presented with a deed to the small ranch he rented. A few kindnesses of this sort Jim James performed; then one day, still clad in his disreputable clothes, but bearing on his person certain papers of value, he swung aboard an east-bound train and was gone from his old haunts.

Chicago heard of him next. In fact it was in the windy city, the metropolis on the Great Lakes, that he performed the second feat which electrified the world. This was nothing less than to discover a diamond mine in the great dumps which lie in the stockyards section of the city. Now everyone knows that the diamond is a mineral of great hardness, consisting of crystallized carbon, and found only in certain favorable soils. But in vain diamond experts protested that it was preposterous to talk of mining the precious stone anywhere in Illinois. Jim James was now a wealthy man. He purchased most of the dumps, including the mineral rights, surrounded his land with armed guards, and proceeded to take out diamonds in spite of the verdict of the experts. Diamonds began to appear on the local markets by

the bucketful; they circulated to New York, Boston. Dealers in precious stones were dumfounded. The charge was made that the jewels were paste. But Jim James smiled at this. By every test imaginable the gems were proved genuine. Then it was asserted that they were being manufactured by a chemical process. Diamonds have been so produced, but only through extreme heat and pressure, small in size and far from perfect, and at prohibitive cost. Jim James exploded this theory by inviting chemists and jewelers to his lot and showing them the crude stones. The experts were astounded. The soil was of the kind in which diamonds had never been found, the geological conditions were all unfavorable, yet in spite of these self-evident facts stones were there in profusion, stones in such quantities as to stagger belief. Jim James was flooding the market with them. People whose fortunes were tied up in these precious gems became panic-stricken.

As is well known, diamonds are plentiful enough, but their output is regulated to maintain the price. The International Diamond Trust, the Beers of Africa, became alarmed. All over the civilized world Jim James and his wonderful find were headline news. The price of diamonds began to drop. There was only one thing for the diamond trust to do. They dared not have an inexhaustible supply of precious gems in the hands of irresponsible people. Jim James must be brought into the syndicate or his mine purchased. The latter was what was done. The sum paid to Jim James was never made public but the newspapers placed it anywhere from ten million to fifty. Then came another sensation. No sooner was the deal with Jim James consummated than the diamond mine petered out! The trust found itself in possession of a lot, a hole in the ground, and so much worthless rubble. Having more stones than they knew what to do with from their African and other mines, this did not altogether displease the trust officials. They were angry, of course; they figured that Jim James in some clever and incomprehensible way had bilked them; they decided it was wise to be philosophical and say little. But the newspapers went wild. They connected up the gold-mine incident of Arizona with that of Chicago and turned out sensational story after story. "Jim James the Man of Mystery." "The Dish-washer with the Midas Touch." So the captions ran. And while the national and international press was broadcasting wilder and wilder news to an avid reading public, turning out lurid Sunday supplement articles by the carload, there happened a third incident which never reached the papers.

There is in the city of New York a world-famous street. It is the financial center of the nation, some claim of the world. And in this street is a magnificent office building housing the offices of the most powerful banking institution ever organized. The head of the house of Dorgan was the third of this line and was called Peter—a tall, thick-set, heavy-jowled man with iron-gray hair and despotic eyes. He had been born to a kingship more powerful and real than that of any six monarchs of Europe. His simple name was the awe of princes. His signature on pieces of paper swayed the destinies of nations. Millions of working-men, their happiness and jobs, lay

under the soft but ruthless hand of this lord of banking. Wars were made, armies came and went, as his interest dictated. From the cradle up he had been educated and molded with but one purpose in view—the wielding of the autocratic power his money conferred. He was proud with the pride of an aristocrat; strong, with the strength of an especially tempered blade; pitiless, with the cool indifference of one who had never suffered poverty or want. This gentleman, then, this Peter Dorgan, this scion of a great banking family, was seated in his private office, thoughtfully pulling on a fragrant and very expensive cigar manufactured for his exclusive consumption, when his secretary, without previous warning, ushered into his presence a man, a visitor, a personage upon whom Peter Dorgan had never before set eyes.

To understand the sheer miracle of such a thing happening, one must be made to realize the utter inaccessibility of the king of bankers. Easier would it be for a poor London cockney to win to the person of England's king in Buckingham Palace than for an ordinary man to have an audience with Peter Dorgan in his office. Even fellow bankers, men of importance in their way, governors, senators, found it next to impossible to arrange interviews with the money king. Between him and the importunities of the world stood a whole array of henchmen; only they were called doormen, clerks, office-boys, managers, presidents, and vice-presidents. But on the morning in question there had appeared in the general offices a soft-voiced, slender man who asked to see Peter Dorgan. He was moderately well-dressed in a dark sack suit. The hat, a brown velour, he carried in one hand. But it was his smile that was remarkable; that, and his eyes. Stony-faced and remote-appearing clerks found themselves unconsciously warming toward him under the influence of both. Crusty managers forgot to repel him in their usually chilly manner. So the stranger progressed from one clerk to another, from business manager to vice-president, always coming nearer his objective, until at last he stood in the anteroom of the great magnate's sanctum confronting one last obstacle—the money king's secretary.

"It is impossible," said the secretary. "Mr. Dorgan sees few people, and then only by special appointment. I can't understand how you have reached me. Someone will be sorry for this."

He stood up crisply and for the first time looked at the person addressed. The stranger smiled gravely. "I apologize for troubling you."

"Oh, it's no trouble, I assure you," returned the secretary quickly. He found himself liking this man. "Only Mr. Dorgan has made it an invariable rule——"

"A rule," said the stranger quietly, "that doesn't apply to me."

Like one under the influence of a hypnotic spell the secretary did an unprecedented thing. Without knocking at the door or first learning the will of his employer, he ushered the stranger into the presence of the latter. Peter Dorgan was astounded. Never had such conduct occurred before. "Bentley," he cried sharply "what does this mean? Who is this man?"

"A gentleman to see you, sir."

"But I have no appointment with any gentleman this morning," frowned Peter Dorgan. "Certainly not with this one."

"But nevertheless, you are pleased to see me," said the stranger softly.

Peter Dorgan's imperious eyes met the level, vital ones of the stranger.

At what he seemed to see in them his hard expression altered. Perhaps the cool assurance of the visitor's remark awoke his interest. Be the explanation what it may, he in turn did an unprecedented thing. He waved the secretary from the room and questioned abruptly, "What is your name?"

"Jim James," answered the stranger.

"Jim James," murmured the banker. "I have never——"

Then he gave a little start and his eyes narrowed.

"Ah," said the other quietly, "I see that you have heard of me."

"Could I help doing so when I read the papers?" smiled Peter Dorgan.

"You are the man from the West, the dish-washer with the Midas touch."

"Yes," said Jim James, almost dreamily, yet with a suggestion of power that did not escape the magnate. "I have made two fortunes and can make a third and a fourth. Money? It is mine to command. Wealth? I can find it where I please. Power? I intend to have it—through you."

"Through me!"

"Yes, it is the easiest way. Without you I could still be powerful. If I wished I could wrest from you the financial supremacy of the world. Believe me, it is far better to have me with you than against you."

"You are very confident," said Peter Dorgan.

"With the consciousness of strength," answered Jim James.

The imperious eyes of one, the level, vital eyes of the other, clashed. Peter Dorgan knew men. It was his one outstanding talent. Besides, for the first time in his hard, self-contained life he felt himself under the sway of another's personality. He who usually dominated was being dominated; he who usually compelled others was himself being compelled. He was conscious of this sudden weakness in himself and yet felt impotent to combat it. As if he sensed the psychological moment, Jim James leaned forward and said: "Gold—it is everywhere. Look! under your hand the desk is solid gold; the walls of the room are gold; and the inkwell is a blood-red ruby!"

Peter Dorgan could scarcely credit the evidence of his eyesight. The dark, heavy-grained desk glittered yellow, the walls reflected the light in red-gold excrescences. And the inkwell? He picked it up. It lay on the palm of his hand like a great drop of blood.

"This is witchcraft," he muttered dazedly.

Jim James said softly: "Think what would happen to the world standard of wealth if gold were to be found as plentiful as sand; if gems and precious jewels became as common as pebbles. The bottom would fall out of the world market, the great financial lords would go down to ruin. What then of the House of Dorgan?" He said softly, "It would be smashed—like that."

There was silence. Peter Dorgan closed his eyes for a moment, and when he opened them again the desk was nothing but a desk of heavy-grained wood, the walls their normal selves, and the inkwell that and nothing else.

"I suppose you know that I could have you declared insane, that——" He wavered to a stop. "What is it you desire?" he asked hoarsely. Jim James told him.

And that is how Jim James made his debut in the financial and social life of the country.

4

The advent of Jim James on Wall Street created another sensation. Everywhere Peter Dorgan introduced him as his partner. He sat on the boards of powerful directorates, not alone as a member, but as a dictator of policies to whom even Peter Dorgan deferred. Men realized that in the person of the ex-hobo and dish-washer, had arisen another great money lord, a titan of business. His wealth grew to be immense, his power practically unbounded. Through it all his quietness, his simplicity of manner never changed. Then suddenly within two years, he quit active business and began to travel. He travelled like an emperor. Paris knew him, and Berlin. In his personal attire he was, alternately, the form of fashion or the picture of poverty. If it pleased him to dress in the correct attire of a gentleman today, it also pleased him to go clad as a navvy tomorrow. But in any costume his manner never varied. That strange personality of his had the same effect whether he was clothed in broadcloth or rags. At Monte Carlo he twelve times broke the bank, playing any and every game, and then purchased the ruined casino for the price of his winnings. For three months he ran the place, taking the gamblers' money six days of the week and distributing it among the losers on the seventh. At the expiration of that time he sold the casino for a song and went on a hunting-trip to Africa. . . .

Jim James was now forty-one, slender, dynamic. Women, of course, he had known. A famous Polish actress had been his mistress for a few months and then shot herself when his fancy wandered. A noted Italian singer had loved him in vain. More than one beautiful woman of high birth and social position had yielded him her caresses. With a ruthlessness which promised nothing, asked for nothing but the pleasure of the moment, he had sated himself with soft arms and warm lips. But never had anything but his passing fancy been engaged. He would, he had sworn to himself, love no woman too much. Something having to do with the love of woman haunted him. It was related to that vague, terrifying dream of his; the dream he had had six years before in a desert city; the dream from which he had awakened conscious of latent forces stirring within himself. And before the dream there had been the book, the strange book over which he had pondered for years.

But he wasn't even sure of that. The book had vanished. And the dream was a recurring nightmare whose salient points ever eluded him. He was sure of only one thing: that he had been reborn in some miraculous fashion; that the timid, weak, spiritless creature who had been Jim James had given place to a dynamic, forceful one; that he who had tramped the roads, had mucked it in ditches, had servilely cringed to others and washed dishes for the right to live, was now a man of destiny; that whatever he willed would be his. Wealth, power, position—they were his for the asking, the finding.

He felt it, he knew it. An inner voice spoke to him and he harkened to its counsel. The discovery of the gold mine did not surprise him; the incident of the diamond mine only made him more sure of his rapidly developing powers. At times fear of himself and his uncanny ability assailed him. That was at first. Then he began to enjoy its use. Under the dynamic drive of his will he went up and up. Men were swayed by his personality. He became a financial power. Great men were proud of his nod of recognition. Only within himself was the saving grace of something of the old Jim James, hobo, dish-washer. He remembered that old Jim James as if he had been a well-beloved but not over-respected brother. He recalled the futile dreams and wild longings of that early Jim James for wealth and position. He used to lie on the roadside with his dirty bundle of bedding and watch the sleek motor-cars of the rich glide by. And what was it that old Jim James used to do? He used to build strange contrivances of sticks and stones and mumble queer sentences. Those sentences came from the book. But there was no book. Jim James shook his head. It was useless trying to separate fact from fiction. No wonder people in those days had thought him daft. But those days were past. He was a power now. Only he did not wish to love a woman. Book or no book, danger lay in loving a woman. He swore he would never love a woman. Then at a formal function in Paris he met Margaret, Countess of Walgrave, a great English beauty with the blood, so it was said, of the unhappy Stuarts in her veins, and all his resolutions were dust.

The countess was sitting in one of the chambers opening off the ballroom surrounded by a large circle of her admirers. She had just heard an incident regarding Jim James and his eccentricities of dress and conduct. An aristocrat by birth, a stickler for all the formality and dignity of her class, she gave her opinion of him in no uncertain terms.

"The man has proved himself a boor, an ignoramus, socially impossible."

"I believe," said one of the gentlemen, "that he is expected here tonight."

"Indeed! Then I trust no one presents him to me. I haven't any desire to make the acquaintance of such canaille no matter how wealthy. Why, it is common report that not so long ago the man was nothing but a navvy!"

"Yes, madam," said a quiet voice, "and a dish-washer, too. Surely you heard of the dish-washing?"

Jim James bowed in front of her, his slim figure correctly garbed in evening dress, continental style, his dark, vital eyes fixed on the countess' face.

"You know," he said in soft conversational tones, "I once blacked shoes a whole year in the city of Los Angeles for fifteen dollars a week and tips. Tips," he said dreamily, "nickels and dimes. How servile I could be for those tips!" He smiled reminiscently.

"And there was the time," he said, "when I was scullion in the kitchen of a California millionaire. But pardon me, I am forgetting my manners, talking of myself. Don't you dance, countess? Then may I have the pleasure——"

To no one's surprise more than her own the countess rose and put her

small hand on his arm. They danced. The man danced divinely. Afterward they sat in a secluded part of the conservatory and talked. She didn't like Jim James, no; but neither was he the boor she had visualized him as being. Besides that, he fascinated her.

"So you think it unpardonable of me to dress now and then as I please? But consider: have I not the right to remind myself of the depths from which I have come? As for the rest, it is the humbler, weaker part of myself paying homage to the stronger—that is all." He dismissed the subject with a shrug of his shoulders. "But let us talk of something more pleasing, of yourself. Your hair in this light, how wonderful it looks; and your eyes. . . ."

Jim James went home that evening (or rather early morning) definitely in love, and with a gnawing pain in some secret place of his body. For the first time since his metamorphosis he felt despondent. "I will never see that woman again," he vowed. The pain bothered him, and in his sleep he dreamed, a nightmarish dream. Or had it been a dream? He drank his late morning coffee. After that he felt better. What nonsense was this about love being dangerous? When and where had he picked up such a superstition? How beautiful the countess was! Danger or no danger, he loved her. The thought of her was like a heady drink. Oh damn that dream! His nerves actually felt jumpy. But with an effort of his powerful will he calmed them.

That afternoon he called at the countess' Parisian home only to be informed she had hastily left Paris on the morning train, en route to England. For the countess herself had passed a disturbed night. The thought of Jim James haunted her. She was afraid of the man and the look of desire she had seen in his eyes. At the same time she felt herself swayed by his personality. Whatever this man wanted he would take. If he wanted her he would take her. He was ruthlessly strong and without mercy. All this she sensed intuitively. But she sensed more than this. He would take, not by force or violence, but with her consent. That was the terrifying reality. Better not to see him again, to flee to safety. So she passed over to England on the afternoon boat, little dreaming that the great white airplane which flew over the steamer in midchannel was the private plane of Jim James bearing him to London.

The countess hadn't been in her town house twenty-four hours, when a slim man in English tweeds rang the entrance bell.

"My lady is in the morning room," said the butler. "If you will please wait until I announce you——"

But the visitor brushed past him with a pleasant smile.

"The morning room, yes. Right ahead? Do not bother, I can find it myself."

The countess looked up, startled, to see Jim James walk into the room. His coming coincided with certain thoughts of hers, for she had been thinking of him. He wasted no time on explanations. With both arms about her, his lips against her cheek (she was somewhat taller than himself), he said chidingly: "Margaret, Margaret, what is the use of running away from me?"

There was no use; she had probably always subconsciously been aware of the fact; yet she struggled in his imprisoning arms.

"You mustn't! It's impossible!"

He held her closer. "Say you love me."

"No—yes—oh, I don't know; I'm not sure. . . ."

Six weeks later they were married.

It was a notable wedding. The groom's gift to the bride was a necklace of emeralds, each stone unrivalled for size and flawless splendor. The event revived all the dormant stories concerning Jim James. The tale of his miraculous rise to wealth and power was retold on two continents and in a thousand newspapers. Conservative estimates placed his fortune at well over a billion dollars. The richest man in the world, he was called, and Jim James alone knew for certain how true were the words.

5

And now Jim James was at the very pinnacle of his stupendous career. Wealth, power, love, all were his. From the woman he loved he compelled love by the sheer force of his dynamic personality. But this compulsion of affection troubled the countess. She was not unhappy. She would have maintained—and with truth—that she loved her husband. But there were times when certain acts of his appalled her. Jim James could be uncouth in his manner. Sometimes his speech was far from grammatical. In his presence those things became negligible; but when she sat by herself she recalled them and they troubled her. As for Jim James, in spite of the fullness of his love, he was not happy. Since the first night of meeting the countess he had been conscious of a dull gnawing pain in some secret part of his body. With the pain came a tendency to dream. Night after night he dreamed, and from those dreams awakened with the fearful impression that some unimaginable horror threatened the woman he loved. The great doctors he consulted could give him no relief. In a certain part of his body was found a curiously shaped scar. How had it gotten there? Jim James could not remember. He strove to recollect when he had incurred it. In vain. As for the dreams, he only knew that they were hideous, that they related to his past. Something sinister came when he slept and it whispered, whispered . . . what did it whisper? The name of his wife. Beads of perspiration stood out on his brow. It was madness! What in the name of God could threaten his wife? He stared at his face in the glass. Was he, the great Jim James, going mad? With an effort he schooled himself to be his quiet, assured self. But more frequently, when alone, the mask slipped and he gave himself over to fits of terrible depression.

At first Jim James did not understand the exact nature of what he feared. In an unostentatious way he surrounded his wife with a thousand safeguards. Trustworthy attendants went with her everywhere. Keepers with loaded rifles kept the walks and the woods of his country mansion under constant surveillance. His own secret-service men watched over his party when they travelled. Such precautions did not irk the countess nor surprise her. After all, Jim James, in his way, was a king, a powerful ruler, and she

was his consort. Great personages always had armed retainers, and she was pleased with the sense of power and importance they conveyed. So things went for the first year of married life. Then happened that which helped to bring all the vague dreams and terrors of months to a weird climax.

Toward the last of that year Jim James had grown afraid of things that glowed. He had to steel himself against the sight of flame in open fireplaces, of illumination in electric bulbs. They reminded him of a far-off spot he had once seen. Something terrible, menacing, lurked behind a red spot. Almost, at times, he could see it.

He went to bed that night in complete darkness. Even in his sleep he was conscious of the dull gnawing pain in his body. He dreamed—or was it a dream? He wakened from it as usual, sitting up in bed, his forehead beaded with perspiration. Through the window at the end of the room a yellow fragment of moon shone. Thank God, he had only been dreaming! What was it in the nightmare that had tendered him a book? But there was no book. He switched on the nightlight at the head of his bed and went to rise. Even as he did so he saw the thing which lay on the coverlet. It was a strange volume, yellow as if with time, and opened at a certain page. Like one petrified in a half-rising position he glared at the book, and as he glared a few sentences of the finely printed and hieroglyphic-like characters leapt out at him like a blow.

For he whose body has been pierced in a secret spot by the horns of Om Nam, lo, from henceforth is he an altar, a gateway from the past to the future, for the coming of the World Ancient.

(A half-witted tramp crouching by the roadside reading a book and making strange contrivances out of sticks and stones. A dish-washer brooding over a steaming sink and washing greasy dishes. A room in a cheap lodging-house and a man raising up a strange altar. Velvet blackness against a white, terrified face, and a shaking voice intoning, "O Liam Maroo. . .")

It all came back. The vague, terrifying dream was a dream no longer. *And in return you shall pay . . . the woman you love.*

"Margaret! Margaret!" screamed the man.

What fiend had ever driven him to such a bargain? For wealth, for power, whispered a voice. But weighed in the scales against the life and safety of the woman he loved, how infinitesimal were wealth and power! Before a hair of her head were injured he would die!

Die . . . yes, that was the solution. Even the World Ancient would be powerless to make a dead man fulfil the dread pact. *He* was the altar, *he* was the gateway, and without him——

The gleaming steel paper-knife lay on the writing-desk. He picked it up. Its sinuous length shone. With steady hand he placed the pointed metal against his heart. One steady push, one powerful thrust. . . . But the blade curled; it was so much paper. With a curse he flung the useless weapon to the floor and sought for the revolver in a drawer of the dresser. That would

do the trick. Thank God, Margaret slept soundly. Two heavy doors were closed between him and her. The revolver was but a toy automatic in size but no less deadly at short range. Its discharge made little noise. The sound would not alarm her. He thought of the slim whiteness of her neck and the proud pale beauty of her face. The barrel of the revolver lay cold against the spot between his eyes. One pressure of the finger. . . .

Perhaps twenty seconds elapsed after he had pulled the trigger before he became conscious of the fact that the weapon held pressed against his forehead was an impotent thing.

Again he pulled the trigger—again—a half-dozen times. Was that laughter he heard?

Suddenly he flung the revolver from him with a stifled cry. He understood. Death was denied him. Between him and self-destruction lay a power that forbade. He was lost, lost! Margaret was doomed! For a moment he sank on the bed and surrendered to utter despair. Then summoning every last atom of his formidable strength he stood up to confront that which was coming.

For the room had darkened. Stygian gloom enwrapped him round. Even the moon had faded from the window, and the window gave no softer blackness against the prevailing gloom. Far off in the infinity of night grew a red spot, lurid, uncanny to behold. In the center of the red spot appeared a face, a terrible face, an *unhuman* face.

"I am here," said the face.

Jim James was on his knees, his hands outstretched.

"O Liam Maroo!" he cried, "mercy, mercy!"

The indescribable face regarded him without passion.

"The bargain was made, the pact sealed; I have come to demand of you the price."

"No, no!" cried Jim James wildly.

"The price," said the face inexorably.

Jim James threw himself on the floor. "Sacrifice me," he cried. "My life, my body, they are yours!"

"Nay," said the face, "I did not bargain for your life. Wealth, power, the ability to sway men, create riches, all these have you had, and have found them good. In return you promised to sacrifice the heart, the brain . . ."

"But I did not understand," cried Jim James.

"Understand!" said the face. "When have you mortals ever understood? Gladly you paid what you had still to possess. Speak! did you not deliberately, of your own accord, weigh power and wealth against love—and choose wealth?"

"Yes, yes! But I did not know what love could be. I had never loved. In my arrogance I thought never to love. Now I know."

The words echoed through the room. Did a shade of pity flash across that unhuman face? The lurid light grew greater. Jim James stared fearfully as massive limbs wavered in a mist of fire, as great curling claws reached out.

He was conscious of only one thing, that somehow, someway, he must save the woman he loved. He was shouting, screaming, "O Liam Maroo, is there no other way to pay the price?"

And the face looking down on him said, "There is a way."

Then he rose to his feet, courage pouring into his shivering body, and asked, "What is the way?"

"That your wealth and honors be stripped from you."

"They are yours."

"Nor is that all. That you sink into the depths from which you rose."

"You mean——"

"That you shall become again what you were when you sought my help. Men shall despise you. Again you shall know the bitter pangs of squalor and poverty. All your wealth and power, your palaces and servants, your mighty friends and sycophants, shall pass from you like a dream, be as if they had never been."

"And my wife?" murmured Jim James.

"Shall cease to love you. The thing in you that holds her now, that makes her real in your existence, will be gone for ever. Nothing will be left to you of the golden present—nothing but a few bitter memories. Think!" cried the face, "think well before you choose. Sacrifice the woman and all that you now have shall still be yours."

"All except the woman."

"But there are other women. Women as fair, women more complaisant."

"But not *the* woman."

"No, not *the* woman. But again I ask you to consider carefully. Sacrifice yourself, all that you are, and were the woman to meet you she would despise you. She will have another lover. While you are swining it in the ditch, she will be living for another, lost to you. Think! What is your choice?"

The face of Jim James looked agonizedly into the inscrutable, unhuman one of Liam Maroo. What! never to know the soft rapture of Margaret's arms again, never to feel the warm pressure of her lips? What! to live in poverty and want while she became the beloved of another? Never! All the burning jealousy of the man woke to life, struggled like serpents in his bosom, scored his face with debasing lines. Better to see her dead—dead!

"Ah," breathed Liam Maroo.

Jim James started as if from an evil spell. He saw the slim whiteness of his wife's neck and the pale proud beauty of her face. Then he straightened up against an oppressive weight and cried hoarsely but in a strong voice:

"All that I have of wealth and power, take them—only spare the woman!"

6

In the city of Nogales, in the Mexican portion of that town which lies on the very borderline between Arizona and Sonora, there stands the American Saloon. Tourists from all over the United States visit this saloon. Within a few feet of the dry territory of Uncle Sam they can put a foot on a

gleaming brass rail brought all the way from Forty-fifth Street, New York, and view themselves in a spotless expanse of mirror behind the bar. They can order small glasses of Scotch or big schooners of beer and listen to Big Pat Durfee bewail the carefree days when Manhattan was still wet and flowing over with licensed cheer. Also they can sometimes observe the person who is responsible for the gleaming polish on the brass rail and the spotlessness of the vast expanse of mirror. This is a slender, dried-up wisp of a man weighing no more than a hundred and twenty pounds. His chin habitually shows a stubble of dirty-black beard and he is clad in frayed, shapeless trousers and a khaki shirt far from clean. This individual goes his way, silently, furtively. Few notice him. If anyone does and makes inquiries, Big Pat answers, "Just an old bum that blew in. A bit cracked in the head, I guess. We call him Crazy Jim."

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